

# THE TANG

HELEN BELL

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BY  
HELEN BELL



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## THE TANG

A spring twilight in the city of New York — her sordidness painted with the rose of the afterglow, powdered with pale blue and violet mists and decked with tiny gems of yellow light.

Through a high window hung with purple and gold one of her many lovers looked upon her with young grim eyes that for the first time pierced her tinsel veil and saw her ugliness.

In his hand, violet-scented, crumpled, lay the messenger of her betrayal.

“ Dear Danny :

“ You can tell by the length of this, I know, that I have something important to say to you. I have — and I was a coward to take this way of doing it instead of telling you last night. But I just *couldn’t*, Danny, while you were right there being my wonderful pal as perfectly as ever, and looking like everything that is handsome and thoughtful and in love all done up in one package and addressed to me.—

"I'm going away, Danny — away out there in the big Northwest where my brother is. I'm going in spite of my hot-house cultivation — in spite of the taunts of the unbelievers — in spite of the spring — and you.

"And to get the hurt part over as soon as possible I must tell you that I decided it all last night as we sat in Sherry's together and listened to the night song of the City. I decided it looking at you — and realizing that you are what you are — my wonderful pal — and that you want me — and what you have to offer me — but oh, Danny, realizing, too, how much you belonged where you were — and how much I did not. For I was stifled by the scented smoke — deafened by the blaring sound of the orchestra — blinded by the glaring lights — and I longed to tear off the chains that kept me there and to push over the table and push over the silly people and run — run — run!

"And while I was wondering where I would like to run, I closed my eyes for a moment and it seemed as though the smoke was the smoke of a campfire — and instead of the lights I saw tiny twinkling stars and across from me sat a man — a wonderful gray-eyed man, Danny, and it was *almost* you — but not

quite. And I opened my eyes and looked at you again and then I was sure that it wasn't. And I wanted to tell you then — to explain to you and try to make you see it as I do — but you were so satisfied — so obviously where you belonged — a polished jewel in a polished setting — that I couldn't.

"You know it's in my blood, Danny,— the 'Tang,' grandfather Barrows used to call it, 'the tang of the great gray spaces.' He was with MacKenzie — and the stories he used to tell us about their adventures were what planted the germ of unrest in Steve, I guess. At any rate he left a fortune and a brilliant career with a pen, for a horse and a gun.

"So I am going to find Steve. He will understand and will know what is best for me to do. It seems strange that I have not heard from him for over six months, but he is probably on some long 'commission.'

"And oh, Danny dear, please do not think I am leaving you *easily*. It's the hardest thing I ever tried to do — for it is true that I *almost* loved you. But always there was something — I never could analyze it, but now I believe I am beginning to understand what it is — that seemed to be lacking.

And I believe that if I do find HIM out there — that he shall be very much like you — with only one thing added — the ‘Tang.’

“Forgive me, Danny, for leaving you like this, if you can — but I could not bear to say good-by. Do not try to follow me. It would do no good — I shall not change my mind.

“BARBARA.”

Suddenly, donning her brightest jewels — some red — some green — more yellow — until her brilliance dimmed the first stars of the evening and the rising moon, the City slipped her shining arms into the shadows of the room and gathered in their embrace the man who belonged to her.

Four thousand miles to the northwest, beside a campfire on a field of snow, another man, in the uniform of the Royal North West Mounted Police, sat reading another letter. It, too, was scented, but faintly, as for two years, confined in a leather wallet, it had traveled strange ways — the trails of men who were “wanted.”

The man read it through slowly, with a half smile on his lips and in his eyes. They were firm

lips — browned to the color of his skin by storm and sun — and the eyes shone gray and kind in the firelight.

“ Dear little Butterfly,” he said softly to the signature at the end. “ You were right — the cold would have frozen your bright little wings and the great silence have terrified you. You were meant for the music of guitars in the southland — for love-songs in summer twilights — for bright lights and for laughter — always.”

As though parting with something once held dear, but irrevocably gone, he touched the bit of paper to the fire. For a moment it seemed to poise on the flame and then, bright-winged against the dark sky, it spread and rose and flew into the night.

The man watched it go, and then he stood and stretched his great arms wide and filled his lungs with the cold clear air.

“ Yes,” he called after it, “ you were right — I *do* love Her more than I loved you — and oh, how glad I am that you sent me out to Her — glistening Siren Country — temptress of the Law and of the Outlaw alike, ever calling to the red blood in men — despising the blue — cold — baffling — unconquered ! ”

As he finished speaking a lobo wolf howled some-

where far to the northward — dismal — uncanny — a challenge of the Siren Country — and in the following silence came the sharp crack of a gun. A bullet sang by his head and struck through the snow a foot beyond the campfire.

He was alert on the instant. With his foot he dug into the hard snow and pushed it on to the fire, deadening it. Then with his eyes searching the elusive blue shadows beyond him, and his hand on his gun, he waited.

# **THE TANG**



# THE TANG

## CHAPTER ONE

Summer had come to the north country — there is no spring — and with it the thaw. The caribou, the geese and the ducks and other birds had come back to the mountains, and the Barrens were covered with moss.

The trappers brought their packs of fur to the coast — in the mines began the washing of the great piles of gravel — and the gardens seemed to spring up overnight in the towns and the settlements.

Across the prairies and around the foothills rang the mating calls of the creatures of the wild.

For three months the Siren Country would smile and wear wild flowers in her hair — and then the stern hard winter would set in again.

In the office of the Commissioner of the Royal North West Mounted Police at Dawson City, two men were talking together on a matter evidently of great importance. The elder sat in the Commis-

sioner's chair and leaned across the desk, searching with hard, eaglelike eyes, the strong tanned face of the young officer who stood before him.

"I can hardly believe," he said, "that he has fooled us again, Lisle. He *must* be dead!"

"Perhaps," replied the younger man, "in which case I shall find his bones. I returned only for more supplies. The trail all the way from the Kicking Horse to the Columbus was impassable. It ought to be thawed out now."

The Commissioner tapped the table impatiently and considered.

"You say the bullet was *not* a Dominion?" he said presently.

"It was a Lüger — a German make," replied the other, "but that doesn't mean anything. He's slick enough to have walked into Dawson right under our noses and bought a new gun."

"Right," said the Commissioner. "He was the wiriest man we had in the service. That's why he was so valuable. That's also why he's now so dangerous. Damn it — you were gone so long I thought you'd turned too. Let's see — when was Roth killed?"

"Two years ago this month."

"Sit down."

Lisle took a chair opposite the desk. The Commissioner opened a drawer and drew out a packet containing about four letters. They were all addressed in a large free feminine handwriting to

"Sgt. Stephen Barrows,  
Dawson City,  
Yukon.

c/o R.N.W.M.P. H'dq'ters.—Canada."

"From his sister," said the Commissioner. "She thinks he's still in the service and she's coming here. In fact she's due to-day."

"Coming *here*," repeated Lisle, "but what—"

"That's just it — but *what*? She thinks she's coming to stay. But of course she isn't. She's going back on the next train. But in the meantime I play the rôle of disillusioner and have my office full of scenes and my neck wept on."

"Couldn't you—" began Lisle.

"Couldn't I *what*?" snapped the Commissioner. "If you've any ideas, tell me about them. But if you're going to suggest that I don't tell her the truth, don't suggest it. Naturally, I thought of that myself. But I want her to know it. She *ought* to

know it. I tell you, Lisle," he cried, pushing the letters into the drawer and shutting it with a bang for emphasis, "that there are too many sisters and mothers and fathers too damned ignorant of the truth about their beloved brothers and sons. If they weren't, they'd grind into 'em what the Law means before they grow a mind of their own an' get beyond it. This silly, trusting young thing—I know she's young by the letters, and I suppose she's silly—considers her brother a hero—has been thinkin' him one all her life—an' it's high time she finds out that he ain't—so she won't be measurin' her standards of men by him. I tell you, Lisle, it's respect for the Law—born an' bred in the blood—that makes an' keeps men—*men!*"

"I beg your pardon," came a girl's voice from the doorway—a clear, soft voice, but somewhat tired, "I wanted to see Commissioner McLean—they told me you were alone. I'll wait," and she started to withdraw.

The men sprang to their feet.

"Come in," said McLean.

The girl hesitated, glancing at Lisle, who saluted his chief and moved toward the door.

"Miss Barrows?" asked the Commissioner.

The girl smiled and nodded. Her eyes were wide and very blue. McLean noted — blue like — of course like Steve's — but like something else, too — snow in shadow, he thought subconsciously — and her hair somehow reminded him of the sky at night. It was black with blue half-lights. Strangely enough, too, the simile was followed out when she smiled. It was like the sunlight flashing on the snow.

Lisle stood aside at the doorway to allow her to pass in. As he did so she looked up at him and for a moment their glances held.

"Somehow," he mused as he stepped into the street, "I don't think McLean's going to have his neck wept on. But if I were he I should be somewhat — er — disappointed!"

"My brother told you I was coming?" asked the girl as she sank wearily into the chair McLean pulled out for her.

At the question the sunlight and the shadows on the snow were forgotten. McLean took a chair opposite her — stern-eyed — brusque — and it was the voice of the Law that answered.

"No," he said shortly, "he did not tell me. I have not seen him — lately."

There was something in the tone of his voice that made the girl start.

"You have not — but then how did you know — where is he?" she faltered.

The Commissioner did not reply at once. For a brief instant he was baffled by the shadows on the snow. They had deepened and grown wider. He found himself wishing he could say something that would make the sun come out again.

"I don't know where he is," he said.

"You mean he is on a commission and you don't just —" began the girl.

"I mean," interrupted McLean, leaning forward and fixing her with eyes that had searched many a face and penetrated the guilt it sought to hide, "that your brother — is missing!"

The sentence was like the click of a gun that fails to go off. He had cocked and aimed and pulled the trigger — but instead of the expected fusillade came but the two words — "is missing."

Perhaps it was because of the shadows — perhaps the memory of the sunlight — some might have called it a "hunch," or the intervention of the hand of Fate. But McLean blamed it upon a sound which

came through the window just at that moment — the long, wailing howl of a dog!

"Missing!" repeated the girl, slowly realizing what the Commissioner meant. Then came a torrent of questions. And McLean replied to each with the truth.

Stephen Barrows had been sent in May two years before to "get" an outlaw called "Robin Hood" because of his practice of robbing only the rich fur traders and merchants, and the rumors that he sent packages containing the booty to addresses in the poor section of Chicago. Barrows had not returned to headquarters nor had any word been received from him. It was generally believed that he was dead. They had indeed searched for him. In fact they were still doing so.

The Commissioner omitted, however, that when Stephen Barrows was found he would be tried for murder. That a certain man calling himself Herbert Roth had come to headquarters in November last and inquired for Steve. On being told that the young officer was out on a commission, he waited in Dawson until February, and then quietly disappeared. Three weeks later two Indian trappers

brought his body back on a dog-sled from a place near the banks of a lake at one end of the Bonnet Plume River, where they had found him with two bullet wounds, one in his arm and the other in his heart. The bullet in the heart was not found, but the one in the arm was a Dominion .42, the official calibre and make of those used by the Mounted. The trappers had also brought a button which they had found in the snow beside the body. It was Stephen Barrows' identification badge.

Investigation as to Herbert Roth's identity disclosed that he had just completed a three-year term in prison for larceny, committed in New York City, and it was learned further that Stephen Barrows had been the lawyer for the prosecution.

The "scene" which McLean had anticipated was not forthcoming. The girl sat forward a little, one hand grasping the arm of the chair rather tightly, but except for this and a slight compression of her lips she gave no sign of emotion.

"I do not believe that he is dead," she said evenly. "I received a letter from him about six months and a half ago — it was postmarked 'Tagish' — and he said he was well, and happier than he had ever been in his life. He didn't say why — but his

letter was different, somehow, than any I had ever received from him before. There was some new note in it — some undercurrent — of happiness. It was that, I believe, which finally decided me to come here. I wanted to find some of what he had put in that letter. I still believe I shall find it — and him!"

At the mention of the letter, McLean's eyes had brightened and he leaned forward with unconcealed interest.

"I beg you not to give up the search," the girl went on, more intensely, "but if you do, I shall search for him myself. In fact I believe I shall do so anyway. There is really no reason why I should not. I have no other interest in the world, and I should love it. You will perhaps help me — tell me how to go about it —"

"The idea is absurd," interrupted McLean. "You know little of the North country or you would realize that. White women in this region travel seldom — and never alone. You must remember that you are alone."

"I am, indeed," replied the girl firmly, "and that is precisely why I am determined to go through with my idea. I shall never go back to New York — I

knew that when I caught my first glimpse of the Yukon. Neither shall I sit back and wait for men, who have already failed, to find my brother. With them it is a mere duty — I believe I shall find him because I want to so much."

McLean tapped the desk impatiently.

"We have no time to encourage or assist a search based on sentiment, Miss Barrows," he said brusquely. "Practical methods bring results, here. What you suggest is impossible — utterly, absolutely impossible. We will resume the search. Lisle shall go out again, alone. In the meantime you may wait in Dawson —"

Rising, the girl interrupted him.

"I shall not wait in Dawson," she said evenly, her eyes meeting his with resolution. "I shall not wait — *anywhere*. I shall go — and if you refuse to help me, I shall go without your help. I am not afraid. I am strong. I can ride and shoot — and now that it is summer —"

The Commissioner rose and towered above her.

"Now that it is summer," he repeated, "the country is full of bogs and marshes that in winter are frozen and passable with snowshoes and sleds. Now that it is summer the men who are hiding from

justice have come out of their caves and their cabins and are wandering everywhere, in search of easy prey.

"Women do such things as you suggest in books, perhaps, that make good reading when one is safe in New York — but they do not do them here.

"As representative of the Law, I *forbid* you to go!"

The girl's eyes did not flinch. Their shadows were as dark as the blue lights on her hair.

"I don't believe you have a law that can stop me!" she challenged.

Suddenly, in through the window there came again the howl of a dog. As the sound reached her ears the girl started and turned to the window.

"Silver!" she cried — "I was sure —"

"Yes," said McLean, "it's Silver, your brother's dog. He added another killing to his record just before Steve left for the last time. We are obliged to keep him chained as no one can approach him. He is very wild."

The girl's eyes glowed and she pressed her hands together excitedly.

"Yes, yes," she cried. "And I must have him — at once!" Then, turning to McLean with tri-

umph, she said, "Now you may forbid as you like — for it will do you no good! If you had but known that my brother trained that dog to follow his scent you might have found him long ago! And as for protection, I wouldn't be afraid to walk into the very jaws of death with Silver. Take me to him, please."

Without a word McLean crossed to the door and opened it for her. He then led the way along the hall and through a rear door into a small courtyard.

Chained to the wall at the further end was the dog called Silver.

He was a cross between a Mackenzie Hound and a Labrador Husky, a powerful animal, with a long silver-black body, a wolf head and eyes and fangs that betrayed the fierceness of the breed.

Stephen Barrows had bought him for fifty dollars from a Swede trapper on a trip through the Klondike two years before he had come to the country to stay.

The dog had an unsavory record — had never exhibited the pride of trace and trail — but had turned on his driver and killed him, after killing five of the best dogs in a team of nine — and the Swede was afraid of him.

Steve took him home, muzzled, mostly as a souvenir. With much patience and kindness he finally succeeded in winning him over to himself and Barbara — and by steady perseverance he taught him to follow his scent, a feat seldom attained by a husky.

Twenty minutes later McLean and Lisle were again alone in the Commissioner's office. McLean stood looking out of the window. Clouds of smoke rolled from a cigar stuck straight into the middle of his hard drawn lips. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, and his eyes gleamed with the light of a great idea.

"Tagish!" he muttered as though to himself — "six months ago — an' Lisle two thousand miles off the trail scourin' frozen hell for 'im. The nerve! Seems to run in the family. But if you're livin', Steve, my boy, we'll get you this time! An' it's your own dog — an' your own sister that's going to do it!"

A startled expression came into the face of the younger man as he caught the words of his chief and the full significance of their meaning.

"You're not going to let her go!" he exclaimed. McLean wheeled and faced him.

"That's just exactly what I'm going to do," he said, and then, perhaps because of the expression in the other's face, he added, "You know Barrows is guilty. He's been too slick for us so far—but we'd get him sooner or later if he's alive—an' she'd know it in the end. This way is quicker, that's all—so what's the difference?"

"The difference of fair play and foul," replied Lisle slowly, his eyes leveling with his chief's.

McLean's voice was hard as he answered.

"There is no such difference in the Law," he snapped.

"The girl will go with the dog and an Indian woman—Naomi, probably. You will follow about a mile to the rear—out of sight, of course. There will be a signal—three shots fired by the squaw in case of danger—in which case you will go to them. You are their protection. When Barrows is found you will bring him back."

A flush mounted to Lisle's hair.

"In that case *I* wouldn't be getting Barrows."

"You went after him before with a dog-sled and

a gun," replied McLean. "This time you will use different means — a dog."

"And a woman!" added Lisle. "I prefer the gun — and a horse."

A flush of anger glowed in McLean's eyes.

"Look here, Lisle," he said meaningly, "I like you — I don't mind saying you're about the best man we've got. But you can go too far, you understand? You're under orders! You were sent to get Barrows. You didn't get him! You know what that means! It's you or Clinton."

"Clinton! Good God! Clinton — and *that* girl?"

"Why not? Clinton has a clean record in the service — he's a little crude, perhaps — but it isn't culture we need here."

Lisle's lips were drawn tight. For a moment steel eyes clashed with steel. Then something else seemed to come into Lisle's. It reminded McLean of the reflection of sunlight on the snow.

"Well?" said the Commissioner suggestively.

The young officer saluted.

"Your orders, sir!" he said.

## CHAPTER TWO

And so it came to pass that, on one of the first soft mornings of June, a girl whose skin was whiter than the women of the North country, and who sat her saddle with the lithe grace of a carefully cultured flower, rode out from Dawson due northeast, on a strange quest — stranger than she knew!

The trim suit of navy blue serge in which she had arrived in Dawson, had been abandoned for khaki riding trousers and belted coat to match, and a wide-brimmed felt hat of brown cast a shadow to just above the tip of a small straight nose. From the nose the shadow followed the firm curved cheeks, and between them, a master stroke in the lovely portrait, her full sweet lips smiled at the new day.

With her, at the head of the pack horses, looming in brilliant relief of bronze and red and black against the gray-blue dawn, rode Naomi, the Indian woman. Close beside the girl's black mare, his long

ears laid back, the joy of his new-found freedom straining for expression in each of his powerful muscles, ran the dog Silver.

A mile behind them, keeping ever out of sight, rode a tall grim-eyed man in the uniform of the Mounted — a man whose appointed task lay heavy upon his heart.

There was, however, none of the spirit of heaviness reflected in the face of Barbara. Buoyant with the conviction that finding her brother would be a simple matter with the aid of the dog, and glowing from the excitement of the adventure and the invigorating exercise, she fairly radiated happiness. Her cheeks were flushed, her hair became disruly, short strands of it whipped and curled across her face, and her wide eyes reflected the glory of the new day. Several times, turning suddenly in some new burst of enthusiasm, she caught the Indian woman regarding her with what on those usually immobile features was an expression of unmistakable admiration.

But Barbara was far too full of the newness of life to interpret the expression. Admiration had been hers ever since she could remember — but here in this great country, stretching before her in one

wide expanse of loveliness, was life — life such as she had read and her brother had written about, such as the stuff of which her dreams had been made.

Ahead of them stretched plains of waving grass dotted with wild-flowers, and far, far beyond were the hills whose snow-capped tops were kissed by tiny pink lips of cloud. And somewhere out there, deep in the heart of it all, was Steve!

She understood now what she had sensed between the lines of his letter. It would be *in hers* now, if she ever stopped just living long enough to write a letter!

The thought of the letter connected the present with the past, and with it came the thought of Danny — Danny the loving and the lovable — Danny the perfect friend — and the girl's face became serious for a moment at the recollection.

They had always ridden together, through the parks of the city — on bridle-paths hedged in one side by automobiles that you must not get in front of, and on the other by people on benches, and baby-carriages, which you must not step on. Once in a while there would be a mile or two which left the autos and the baby-carriages, and then they would give their horses rein and it would seem to

Barbara that that was the nearest she had ever come to the fulfilment of her dreams.

And sometimes she would close her eyes during that short run and imagine that they were galloping not on a narrow path but on a plain — a great rolling plain that stretched away before them clear to the very rim of the world — and that there was nothing beneath the sky to stop them from riding on and on until they came to it.

And again would come the illusion that the man who rode beside her was *not quite Danny!*

She wondered now whether she was missing him or not. Life seemed strangely dull without him. It would have been nice to have him there to enjoy it all with her. And yet she knew that although Danny undoubtedly *would* enjoy it, after they had ridden until the horses were tired, Danny would want to turn around and go back — back to a warm cooked dinner in a comfortable dining room — back to the nearest thing he could get to the hedged-in road!

Yes, she missed Danny, but it was, she decided, in a resigned sort of way in which one misses that which has been left very, very far behind — and which one expects never to see again.

And if the thought of the ride partly convinced her of the great barrier which lay between Danny and herself, her first meal cooked in the open strengthened and sealed the conviction. To Barbara it was the most wonderful meal she had ever eaten. To Danny it would have been something to be tolerated, as sometimes necessary but unpleasant things are tolerated.

They had ridden about thirty miles the first day, striking the North Fork of the Klondike River shortly before sundown, and here they made their first camp.

In spite of a perceptible lameness, her inexhaustible enthusiasm eager for any new phase of the adventure, Barbara insisted on helping Naomi to unpack, gather sticks and stones for the fire, and even in preparing the meal. The culinary methods of the Indian woman were no more foreign to Barbara than those of her own civilization, as her experience so far had been limited to brewing tea. For the first time in her life she felt a pang of shame at her incompetency, in spite of Naomi's insistence that "Mees hands too white to cook."

To which Barbara replied, somewhat petulantly, "They will not be so white, soon, I hope."

Presently the darkness came and with it the stars, and the tension of the excitement which had been paramount in Barbara all during the day gave place to another sensation which, too, was a part of this new life. It crept into her heart and shone from her eyes as she gazed across and above the campfire. It was peace—the calm, perfect peace of a night under the stars.

"Naomi," she asked after awhile, the hush of the wonder of it all in her voice, "what makes the stars so bright here? I never saw them like that."

"Men would say it is the clear air," replied the Indian woman, "but I think it is the reflection of Mees' eyes."

The girl laughed, unconsciously pleased with the compliment from one so taciturn.

"That was very pretty," she said. "I wish it might be true. But somehow I feel very small—and unnecessary."

There was silence for awhile, and then suddenly the girl stood up and looked back in the direction from which they had come.

"Naomi," she said, "what is that light I see farther back along the river?"

Naomi sat hunched in her blankets, blinking sleep-

ily at the fire. She did not turn her eyes from the flames as she answered.

"It is the light of other camp-fire, Mees."

The girl stood watching it for several minutes, then turning she saw Naomi's head sinking lower and lower and her dark eyes struggling to keep open.

"Come," she said, "we will go to bed — or to blanket or whatever you call it. I believe I am very tired — but I'm not a bit sleepy. It seems almost too bad to sleep — and waste all this!"

For hours she lay staring straight up at the sky, her imagination racing ahead into the days of their journey to follow — wonderful days of riding and nights of sleeping under the stars. She almost hoped that they would not find Steve for quite awhile, never believing but that he was safe and happy, for she wondered how anyone could be anything else in such a place.

Suddenly she thought of the other camp-fire again, and, sitting up softly, she looked back. It was still there, only fainter now.

"Guess he's sleeping," she thought as she dropped back again, and then she laughed softly to herself.

"Silly," she murmured drowsily, "I believe I'm actually getting romantic over the only other

sign of life in sight. And he's probably a homely old trapper — or maybe an Indian — or maybe a — he's probably a homely — wouldn't it be funny — but no, he's probably — ”

But the man by the other campfire was not sleeping. He was sitting by his dying fire, staring into it — but he did not see it. He saw a girl, slim, sweet, with eyes like the shadows on the snow — and hair the color of the sky that stretched above him — and he heard again the words of his chief,

“ This time you will use different means.” And for the first time in his life he doubted the infallibility of man-made law.

Presently he turned and looked on to where he could see the last faint glow of her campfire.

“ God forgive me,” he said softly, as though consigning the case to a higher court, “ but I almost hope you won’t find him!”

The first rays of the sun awoke Barbara. Naomi had prepared breakfast, fed and watered the horses, and was now engaged in throwing pieces of meat to Silver, who eyed her suspiciously as he advanced, stiff-legged and bristling, to pick them up.

Barbara had warned her to pay no attention to the dog and to keep away from him as much as possible except to feed him, believing that through this medium he might become reconciled to the woman.

And except at such times, the dog in turn paid no attention to Naomi. She was obviously a part of the things which belonged to his mistress, to whom he was now loyal as only a dog can be—and as such he tolerated her.

The second day was hot and sultry, and the horses showed visible signs of fatigue when they stopped to lunch beneath a clump of spruces near a small stream of spring water. Naomi suggested that they rest here a few hours, and Barbara took advantage of the opportunity to exercise her stiffened knees and to explore in the direction of the source of the stream.

She had not gone far when she came upon a well-worn trail which led in the direction of the water. An experienced eye would have recognized the nature of the trail, but to Barbara it was but one more beckoning, enchanted finger of this wonderland.

Scarcely knowing why she did so, she slackened her steps and moved almost silently as she came to the opening in the trees which led to the stream.

And just before she stepped into it her eyes fell upon a sight which turned her rigid.

On the bank, not more than ten yards away from her, was a large brown bear and one small round cub.

The soft hot breeze was blowing from the bear to Barbara and the sound of her approach had been drowned in the noise of the running water. The cub was wandering aimlessly about, mostly in circles, sniffing and pawing curiously at everything in sight. The mother was clawing a piece of rotted driftwood and now and then snatching at some insect with her long curved front claws.

As Barbara leaned forward in her fascination, a stick cracked under her foot and the bear raised her head and began to sniff the air. Slowly she turned to where Barbara stood transfixed and seemingly unable to move, and for a long second these two beautiful representatives of the highest civilization and the wildest of the wild stared at one another.

The bear made the first move. With a low, startled whine she turned and ran to her cub, bundled him unceremoniously between her forelegs, shoved him into the stream ahead of her, and holding him so that his little nose and mouth, the latter squealing

with surprise and alarm, were just above the water, she kicked out with her powerful hind legs and swam rapidly to the opposite shore, crashing with him into the underbrush.

For a full minute after the bear and her cub had disappeared, Barbara stood looking after her, her lips parted and her eyes wide with excitement. She had a queer sense of wondering why it had been the bear that had run first. Then she turned and ran back to camp — and as she ran she remembered vaguely that one of the animal's ears had been half torn away — by a shot, sometime, she thought.

Naomi listened stolidly to the girl's breathless description, and without comment unstrapped her rifle from her saddle and started in the direction of the trail.

Barbara sprang forward in alarm.

"What are you going to do?" she cried, laying a detaining hand on the woman's arm.

"Kill him bear, mebbe," replied Naomi, "bear-skin warm winter coat."

"But we don't *need* it," cried the girl, "oh, no, Naomi, you must not do it! If you had but seen them —"

"Winter come two months — mebbe we no find

brother — bear skin make warm coat," insisted Naomi.

But Barbara was firm. The mother bear and her cub had impressed the girl deeply — and unconsciously she had learned her first lesson of the wild. — the lesson which is so apparent to those who can read it — of when to kill and when not to kill.

" You must not do it!" she repeated, and the Indian woman recognized the tone of authority.

But Naomi had the chance to use her rifle later on in the afternoon, and this time Barbara did not stop her. About sundown a wedge of wild ducks drove directly over them.

The two women watched them as they wheeled and flew back a mile.

" They will come again," said Naomi as she unstrapped her gun.

Realizing her difference in feeling toward the present situation, and somewhat at a loss to understand it, Barbara said thoughtfully,

" I suppose it's not so bad — when there aren't any — cubs."

As she spoke, from somewhere to their rear came three muffled shots, and two of the birds drifted

slowly down to earth. Barbara stood in her stirrups and looked back.

"Did you see that, Naomi?" she cried, "there is someone back of us — just about as far as that fire we saw last night."

"Mebbe trappers," replied Naomi, poising her rifle in readiness as she waited for the birds to drive over again.

As she spoke there came another series of shots, but this time to the left of them, and one of the birds dropped.

Naomi lowered her rifle and looked intently in the direction of the last shots. In a moment they were repeated, but the ducks were not touched. They swerved a little to the right, and as they passed directly over the heads of the women once more, Naomi strapped her gun to its place.

"You changed your mind?" inquired Barbara.

"Yes," replied Naomi, gathering up her reins, "too many trappers not good."

And so, through a glorious sunny week, they traveled on across level country, around the foot-hills in which the Blackstone and the Hart Rivers began, making an average of thirty miles a day and

encountering their first mountain climbing around the source of the Wind River. They crossed the stream at its shallow end and finally arrived at a small lake, from which flowed the Bonnet Plume.

There was no definite plan to their wanderings. Naomi's instruction had been to follow the easiest trails and to give the dog the lead if he showed any signs of having discovered the familiar scent.

Barbara had taken with her a coat which Steve had left at headquarters. Every morning just before they started out she held it before Silver's nose. When he had sniffed at it and then pranced about it excitedly, whining and looking up into her face with obvious eager questioning, she would jump into her saddle, urge the mare into a gallop, and cry,

"Come on, Silver! Come! Find him! Find him!"

The dog understood. He understood that this mistress of his was looking for his master — and that she was depending upon him to help her. And so, from the time they broke camp in the morning until they made it again at night, Silver's sensitive nose skimmed the ground in search of the beloved scent.

And more and more often he would desert the

camp at night, scouting about in the foothills, ever in search of the trail. At times other scents would cross his path — those of creatures of the wild — and, when the scent was to his liking, he would hunt down the maker of it and bring his offering to the feet of his mistress. And when Barbara would scold him, Naomi would say,

“ It is the wolf that kills — it is the dog which brings back. Mees cannot tame the wolf. Mebbe some day she be glad for that.”

And one night, as they stretched in their blankets on the shore of the lake, Barbara remembered the words of the Indian woman. For there broke across the silence, so near that she sat bolt upright, a long piercing wail so like a death or torture cry that the girl’s blood seemed to freeze in her veins.

With fangs bared, bristling, quivering, Silver sprang up and stood staring into the darkness. Then as the sound came again, nearer, he bolted off and did not return until dawn.

“ It is the wolf,” said Naomi’s voice from the blankets, “ the lobo-wolf. It is not harm.”

Barbara was about to drop down again, when back in the direction from which they had come she saw a light — and far beyond it, faint but unmis-

takable, was another. As she looked, two more attracted her — one to the right of the lake, and the other to the left.

For the first time the fear of the unknown crept over her, and she slipped back into the blankets and pulled them up over her ears, like a child afraid of the dark.

And on the following night, as though some subtle turn in the events of their journey had come with the wail of the lobo wolf and the mysterious lights, two things happened which to Barbara were far more disquieting.

The night was unusually dark, and the stars were hidden by swift moving clouds. They were camped in an open space halfway between the lake and the foothills around the Peel River.

Barbara was sitting cross-legged before the fire, poking the embers with a stick, one arm flung across the shaggy neck of Silver, who had been strangely restless all the evening, pushing his nose here and there into the soft grass and whining softly.

Suddenly the stick dislodged something from the soft loam near the fire. Barbara picked it up and wiped it on the grass.

It was a black leather cardcase — and the girl stared at the name engraved upon it with eyes suddenly grown wide with surprise and consternation.

“ Roth! ” she cried aloud. “ Roth! — *here!* ”

She sat holding it as though it were indeed some loathed thing, repeating the name over again.

“ Herbert Roth — *here!* ”

As she sat thus, Silver sprang suddenly from beneath her arm and stood snarling and sniffing the air.

Naomi turned her head in the direction the dog was facing, and listened.

“ Someone comes,” she said, “ Mees better hold dog.”

With an effort the girl aroused her attention from the card-case. She twisted her fingers in the long hair of Silver’s neck and called to him sharply.

As she did so the sound of a horse’s feet, running, became audible, then louder — and after a moment in which Barbara’s heart seemed to stand still, a man rode out of the blackness, and swung to the ground into the circle of the firelight.

“ Good evening,” he said, “ this is indeed an unexpected pleasure! ”

Not only the words, but the manner in which they

were spoken seemed entirely out of place. The voice was soft, refined, and possessed an unmistakable English accent, and the gesture which accompanied them was worthy of a courtier.

The man's face was one of the handsomest Barbara had ever seen. Set in features of symmetric beauty were eyes that were as startlingly black as his teeth were startlingly white. His thick black hair was combed with precision, he was clean-shaven except for a slight, carefully trimmed mustache, and his physique was such that any man might envy.

It was his attire, however, which was the most astonishing of all.

He wore the red pea-jacket of the uniform of the Mounted with the three gold stripes of a sergeant on the sleeve. Over his trousers were a pair of sheep-skin chaps and the cap he held in his hand was an English tweed.

Under any other circumstances Barbara would have been impelled to laugh, but there was that about the superb air of the man which forbade it.

Apparently he read the girl's thoughts, for with a slight laugh and a straightening jerk to the jacket, he said,

"I see you are admiring my outfit. I'm rather inclined to variety — and souvenirs. May I sit down?"

Without waiting for the permission he dropped to the grass, and Barbara noted the grace which accompanied the movement. As he spread his hands to the fire, an action altogether unwarranted owing to the warmth of the night, she was further mystified to observe that they were spotlessly clean, as were also the strong evenly clipped nails which tipped them.

He was indeed a surprising deviation from what she might have expected their first meeting in the wilderness to be.

"Introductions," he said, "are undoubtedly in order. At least judging from what I can remember from the balmy days 'outside.' Therefore permit me—I am Lord Harold Hope, of the County of Surrey, England, first Earl of Greycliffe, gentleman by birth, adventurer by choice, outlaw by circumstance — a conglomeration only surpassed by my attire — and I am here in search of my tooth-brush. I dropped it from my coat pocket during an argument with a gentleman on this exact location. Have you, by any chance, come across it?"

The audacity of the man was followed by such a good-natured smile that it was entirely disarming. For the first time he turned and looked Barbara full in the eyes. And if she had expected to obtain any clue to the man through these "windows of his soul" she was disappointed. The eyes which met hers were utterly frank and without guile. Surely there could be no evil behind such a gaze, in spite of the fact that he had included "outlaw" in his introduction.

The girl felt a little glow of excitement surge through her once more. Perhaps this man was one of those "adventurers by choice" who open themselves to circumstantial evidence more than the average man by very reason of their adventuresomeness, and are oftentimes convicted by it. She felt her interest in him strengthen, and, with a little inward catch of relief, she laughed outright and replied to his inquiry in the negative. Then to the dog, "Down, Silver!"

For the first time Lord Harold turned his attention to the snarling animal. "Cute little lap dog," he remarked. "Doesn't seem to care for me. Wonder if it's my name, my attire, or personality, which offends him the most?"

"He doesn't care for strangers."

Suddenly Naomi spoke. Her black eyes were riveted on the man's face and her voice was shaken with unconcealed emotion.

"Lord Harold not stranger," she said slowly.  
"Lord Harold better — *go!*"

With a start the man turned and looked at her intently, and in the fraction of a second which followed a change came over his face. His profile being turned to her, Barbara did not get its full affect, but she sensed it. It was only for a moment, however. With absolute composure, and ignoring Naomi completely, he turned to the girl again — and once more the limpid, guileless eyes looked into hers.

"The squaw appears to agree with the dog," he said, "and you?"

Before Barbara could reply, Naomi arose and faced him.

"Squaw agree with dog — Mees agree with squaw. Lord Harold *better go!*"

The man looked up into the stolid face and caught the glint of something which the brown hand covered. With a shrug and a short laugh he rose to his feet.

"I yield to the majority," he said, "and to the will of the gun—and the beautiful young lady. Besides, it's getting late and I have another call to make. May we meet again?"

"It best we not meet again!" came the voice of Naomi.

With mock courtesy Lord Harold turned to the Indian woman and bowed low.

"We shall meet again!" he said deliberately, then to Barbara, "Adios!"

He turned and swung into his saddle, bowed to the girl with a wide sweep of his cap, patted his horse on the neck and galloped off into the night.

"Naomi," said Barbara, "why were you so disturbed—and why did you order him away so rudely. Who is he?"

"Outlaw," said Naomi laconically as she settled herself once more before the fire.

"What has he done?" persisted Barbara in spite of the woman's obvious reluctance to give her any information.

"He is a thief," replied Naomi slowly, her dark eyes burning with emotion, "he is a robber of furs and of horses—of cattle—of the heart's blood of men—and of the hearts of women!"

Long into the night Barbara lay inside the tiny tent which they had put up for the first time, on account of the lowering clouds, thinking of their strange visitor — the murderer with the eyes of a child, the cardcase with the name of Herbert Roth upon it, and the four mysterious lights. The incidents and the facts connected with them passed through her mind like the figures of a kaleidoscope, forming never the same pattern.

Undoubtedly one of the four campfires had belonged to Lord Harold. Did one of the others belong to Herbert Roth — the one perhaps which seemed to appear always about the distance of a mile behind them? Was Roth following them?

A strange fear gripped at her heart as she thought of this.

Again, was Roth the one on whom Lord Harold was going to "call" and was he the one with whom the outlaw had had the "argument"? The card-case would make this seem likely. And why was Roth here at all?

With a start she thought of the red coat with the three gold stripes. To whom had the coat belonged? The chaps — and the cap? She shuddered as she remembered the man's reference to souvenirs — and

Naomi's words, "a thief of the heart's blood of men!"

And where and who were the women whose hearts this handsome, innocent-eyed murderer had stolen?

Suddenly, very faint and far away, but not to be mistaken, came the sound of three shots — a pause and the shots were repeated. Barbara got up, went to the tent flap and looked in the direction from which the sounds came.

Behind them in exactly the same distance as before was the light of a campfire — and beyond to the left of it, was another — and there was a third off towards the extreme right.

"Naomi!" she called softly as though fearing to attract some unseen peril, "Naomi! there were shots again! — and the lights — they are the same distance as before! Could someone be following us?"

There was no answer. The girl turned to where the blankets of the Indian woman lay stretched before the fire — empty!

## CHAPTER THREE

John Lisle was an American, from a small town in Vermont. College-bred, at the age of twenty-three, he had become interested in the subject of mining, and after a training in the theory, had taken a trip to Alaska with the intention of following up his inclination for a year or two of actual participation.

In Nome he had met one Brewster, a veteran of the Mounted, whose remaining days, now that he had long passed the age limit of the service, were consecrated to expounding its merits, advantages, and heroism.

Lisle's initial mining experiments having proved unsuccessful, he had been slowly won from a mild and somewhat amused interest in the tales told by the old man, to an impelling desire to join the force.

Accordingly he had left for the Yukon country, and for three years had traveled with detachments or alone, the trails of fugitives of the law.

In his second year he had been advanced to "Sergeant."

As the length of his service had increased, so had his love for the big free life which it compelled and for the adventure which the dangers of it involved. The narrow life of his home town became a half forgotten thing; and the life of the cities, to which the particular phase of the mining business in which he had been interested would eventually have led him, seemed now like a prison sentence from which, somehow, he had miraculously escaped.

Also, with his experience had come a respect and regard for the oath under which he was bound which amounted almost to reverence, and as had so many other splendid men, he had consecrated to this oath his heart and his life.

Not until the day when his chief had sent him out on the trail of Stephen Barrows for the second time had he for a single instant doubted the perfection of the thing for which that oath stood.

Even now it could hardly be said that he doubted it. If there was a flaw he felt that it was in the manner of the execution of the law and not in the law itself. He knew that McLean had done nothing unlawful in sending this girl out in search of her

brother, even under such circumstances. The law was full of regretful circumstances — was often obliged to use them to gain its ends — and it should not be merely the gray-blue eyes of a girl that should change that.

But it seemed to Lisle that McLean should have told this girl the whole truth, and then should have given her the sporting chance of searching for her brother with the dog if she wished, at the same time, of course, using every effort on the law's behalf, but independently and with his own men.

But as much as he disliked his task, Lisle was thankful that it was he and not Clinton who had been appointed the girl's protector. He knew nothing against the man, but all during the two years in which they had been together in the service he had felt the instinctive aversion that a man who looks straight into the eyes of those to whom he speaks feels toward one who does not.

Moreover, Clinton's attitude on the subject of women irritated Lisle. It was not one to inspire respect, or confidence, even though the man's association with them apparently was limited to an occasional chuck under the chin or a lunch counter conversation with a shop-girl or waitress.

Again, there was something rather pleasing about the thought of being this girl's protector. Back in the little Vermont town there had been a girl with eyes very like hers — except that those had been always laughing, tantalizing, challenging, like the wide bright wings of a blue butterfly — always poised for flight and tempting him to follow — while this girl's were grayer, graver — like shadows on the snow.

The first week and a half of the journey had passed slowly to Lisle. Taking the initiative on a trail was a very different matter from following passively after those who were to do the work which originally had been cut out for him. There was none of the stimulating interest which had accompanied his former search, except the possible chance of being of service to the girl whose trail he followed.

During the first week he had encountered no one except some Indian trappers whom he had passed with a momentary greeting. But on the ninth day out he had been attracted by the appearance of a campfire light about two miles to his rear, and again on the tenth night by its reappearance.

When on the following night the light appeared

again, Lisle deadened his fire and circled back to investigate.

Just out of earshot he tied his horse to a piece of brush and crept on foot to within about twenty yards of the fire and the figure which sat staring dejectedly away from it in the direction of Lisle's own.

The man who sat thus was about twenty-five, long, slim, and well built, with a refined, rather sensitive face.

"Tenderfoot," thought Lisle as he observed the tan which had but recently left the "burn" stage, and the slimness of the hands which lay across the stranger's knees.

Lisle went back a few paces and then advanced again, this time making no effort to silence his approach.

The stranger turned sharply at the sound of the footsteps. Lisle noted that he did not reach instinctively for his gun as would a man who was accustomed to the ways of the north country.

"Evening," said Lisle, as he stepped into the circle of the fire-light.

The stranger jumped up and the expression on his face arrested Lisle's attention at once. It was with-

out fear, wistful, eager, searching. He stared at Lisle for a moment and then with a strange break in his voice reached forward and grasped the young officer's hands.

"For God's sake," he cried, "come and talk to me!"

It was the cry of a man utterly lonesome — the cry of the "tenderfoot" in the land of great spaces.

In the firm clasp of their hands Lisle measured his man, and instinctively he felt his heart go out to him. He may have been influenced somewhat by his own loneliness of the past ten days. At any rate he said:

"I'd do that gladly. But unfortunately I cannot stay. I must go back to my 'post' by yonder camp-fire. But I'd be glad if you'd go with me."

The "tenderfoot's" pleasure at the suggestion was evident.

"Fine!" he cried, "in half an hour more I would have been there anyway. I was just thinking about it when you came. I've noticed your light for two or three nights now — and it's infernally lonesome in this place!"

"It is," replied Lisle, "when you're not used to it."

"In that respect," said the other, "I believe I'm hopeless. It would take me at least a life-time to accomplish it." He began to deaden the fire and pack his kit.

The stranger was obviously an experienced rider, and in less than twenty minutes they arrived at Lisle's camp. Lisle learned that the tenderfoot's name was Blake and that he had come to the Yukon from America on a mission which for various reasons he did not care to disclose. Lisle accepted his reticence with a like attitude. He told him only that he was on the trail of a criminal.

After this they talked of the two countries — of the North, and of the "outside" — and Blake chatted on with the boyish eagerness of one long isolated from his fellowmen. He asked many questions concerning the life of the police, and Lisle found himself expounding its exploits and adventures with all the enthusiasm of his old friend Brewster.

"In which direction does your trail lie tomorrow?" he asked as they sat late before the fire.

Blake laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows," he said, "I'm rather rudderless. And yours?"

"Across to the Peel foothills,—I think," Lisle replied, looking off towards a faintly glowing light ahead of them.

"Want to come along?"

"Just that!" said Blake, laughing as though relieved. "I was afraid you might want to — chuck me. And if you did I might almost be tempted to turn and run back home."

Lisle laughed and stood up. A light far to the left of them had attracted his attention.

"Curiosity being an asset in my profession," he said, presently, "guess I'll take a little jaunt in the direction of yon glow. Keep house till I return, will you?"

Lisle rode for twenty minutes, keeping his horse below a run, and drew up about thirty paces from the camp-fire. It was burning brightly, but there was no one in sight. Lisle sat silent for a few moments, and then, satisfied that there was no one about, rode up.

Aside from a recently emptied sardine can and a burned crust of bread he at first discovered no further trace of the maker of the camp. But as he was about to leave he saw something sharp and shiny on

the ground at his feet. He stooped and picked up the small steel blade of a safety razor.

"I take it he shaves," he said to himself, "not much of a clue."

He tossed the blade back on the grass. As he did so he stopped as though struck, and listened.

Across the darkness had come three pistol shots. A pause and they were repeated — one — two — three! Lisle leaped for his horse and rode at top speed in the direction from which the sounds came — the direction of Barbara Barrows' camp-fire!

Blake sat where Lisle had left him. The glad, eager expression which had been in his eyes during their evening together had gone — and in its place was one that was almost haggard in its intensity of sorrow and longing. Across his inward vision there passed dim, lovely pictures — pictures of another country — of another face.

As he sat thus, his horse whinnied softly nearby. And immediately it was answered by another.

Blake sat up sharply. If Lisle had returned he would have made some sound — and there was no other horse near but Blake's own.

As he stepped out of the circle of light, something

moved not more than three yards ahead of him, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he distinctly made out a figure jumping to the back of a horse.

Scarcely knowing why he did so, Blake reached for his gun, and cried out,

“Who’s there?”

The figure on the horse did not reply, but Blake’s movement toward the gun evidently had been sufficient to check its flight.

“Who’s there?” repeated Blake, advancing slowly.

“Squaw,” came a voice from the figure. It was unmistakably a woman’s voice, low and decidedly foreign.

“What do you want?” asked Blake, replacing his gun.

“Other white man — not you,” came the voice laconically, “squaw make mistake.”

Blake was about to ask her if Lisle was the man she wanted, but thought better of it.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” he asked, a new thought striking him.

The woman did not reply at once. Presently she wheeled her horse sharply.

"No," she said and started off.

Blake was about to return to the fire when three shots rang through the night. He scanned the darkness in the direction from which they came. A light twinkled far to the right of the one to which Lisle had gone. And still further to the right was another. As he looked the shots were repeated.

Blake untied his horse and swung into the saddle.

"It might be — it might be!" he muttered as he rode.

Barbara stood as though turned to stone, staring at the empty blankets. She was utterly alone. The place where Silver's long body had flattened the grass was deserted.

In that moment it seemed to the girl that she was the only living soul in the whole world — and nothing short of that actual experience could have produced upon her any greater feeling of dread. The blackness beyond the fire-light seemed to press in upon her like some great unhuman thing waiting to devour her, and beyond were the eyes of the creature — three tiny specks of flame!

If only Silver had been there! Unconsciously she

was more alarmed at his absence than at that of Naomi — not but what she believed he would return — but in the meantime —

How long she stood there as though frozen, staring straight ahead of her at the three points of light, Barbara never knew. But after what seemed to be hours, she heard the sound of a horse's feet coming rapidly — very rapidly.

Automatically she reached for the small Browning which was strapped to her belt — and cocked it in the direction of the oncoming hoof-beats.

It might be Naomi — and it might not!

The sounds came to an abrupt stop just beyond her vision, and someone dropped to the ground and came toward her across the grass.

"Who's there?" she called, steadying her voice with an effort and raising the gun.

"A friend," came a man's voice in reply — and the firelight caught first the brilliant red of his coat as he advanced.

Barbara's heart gave a great bound, and the hand which held the Browning began to tremble in spite of her efforts.

Lord Harold had returned!

As Blake galloped on through the darkness he listened intently for hoof-beats ahead. His intention, vaguely formed, was to follow the Indian woman, who seemed to have gone in the same direction from which the sound of the shots had come.

As he came to within a hundred yards of the camp-fire, which had been to their extreme right, he saw a horse and rider silhouetted dimly against the glow.

He slackened his pace, drew rein and slipped to the grass, proceeding forward slowly, leading the horse. The figure ahead of him had done the same.

The Indian woman was the first to see the man who lay limply, face downward, on the grass. With a startled exclamation she ran to him and turned him over, scanning his face anxiously. Then with a gesture of relief she sank to her knees and laid her ear upon his breast.

The man wore the uniform of the Mounted—and there were three gold stripes upon the red sleeve which were being rapidly dulled by a dark stream of blood!

The man who faced Barbara's gun was not Lord Harold. With a gasp of relief she recognized the

tanned face of the young Sergeant she had passed in the door of McLean's office at Dawson. The hand which held the gun dropped to her side.

"I beg your pardon," he was saying. "I heard shots — they seemed to come from this direction."

"Oh!" gasped Barbara, "I'm so glad it's — you!"

"So am I," replied Lisle, smiling, and Barbara continued,

"I heard them too — but I was too frightened to be able to tell from which direction they came. It is all very strange — my Indian woman has gone — and my dog. They disappeared within the last half hour."

"Gone!" repeated Lisle, amazed, his eyes quickly taking in the empty blankets and the spot of flattened grass.

"Yes," continued the girl, her wide eyes filled with consternation and appeal, "we had a caller — an outlaw — who introduced himself as 'Lord Harold' —"

"Lord Harold!" interrupted Lisle, starting violently. "Good —" then checking himself, he said gravely,

"You must tell me all about that — what did he

say? Which way did he go when he left? It may have a lot to do with the Indian woman's disappearance."

"He said he came in search of his toothbrush," replied Barbara, a faint smile accompanying her words in spite of the seriousness of the situation, "which he had dropped during an argument with a gentleman in this exact location. He had been here only about five minutes when Naomi warned him away — with her gun, I think, although I did not just see it. She seemed to know all about him."

"Toothbrush, eh," mused Lisle, and then, "a fastidious outlaw — he was clean shaven, was he not?"

"Yes," replied Barbara, "I noticed that particularly — also his spotless hands and nails. As a specimen of outlaw he was a trifle surprising."

"He's a bad character," said Lisle gravely, "and I have no doubt is directly responsible for the shots — and possibly for the disappearance of Naomi. The dog appears to be quite able to take care of himself, judging from what I saw of him at Dawson."

"He is, indeed," answered Barbara, "and my only fear concerning him is that he might do a great deal of harm to the spectacular outlaw. Silver was unusually disturbed by him. I had to hold him by

force — and, after all, the man is human — and I should hate to think —”

“ Almost, perhaps,” interrupted Lisle, “ but not quite. Nothing really human could have done some of the things he has. Personally, I admire the dog’s keen perception.”

“ The shots,” he added, “ must have been further on to the right. I must investigate — but I don’t like to leave you here alone.”

“ I don’t like you to,” replied Barbara with a nervous attempt at a laugh. “ If I ever believed myself to be brave, I am thoroughly disillusioned. I’m scared to death, and if you leave me I shall surely dig a hole in the ground and bury myself in it!”

Lisle laughed.

“ Get your horse,” he said, “ and come along. If there’s any trouble you can at least run and hide in the darkness and leave the rest to me, while here you’re an open target — and alone.”

Barbara obeyed immediately, making no effort to bind up the heavy dark hair which clouded about her shoulders.

“ ‘ A woman’s crowning glory ’ —” thought Lisle as he passed behind her into the darkness.

"We'll make for that campfire," said Lisle as they turned their horses toward the left. "I have a hunch."

They rode on in silence, keeping the horses down to a slow trot, their hoofs making scarcely any sound on the thick carpet of grass.

When they came within thirty paces of the fire, Lisle motioned for Barbara to stop.

"You wait here," he said as he drew up beside her. "I'll go ahead. If there's any sign of trouble, just lie low — and I'll come back. I promise," he added and rode on.

From where Barbara sat she could make out distinctly two figures in front of the fire and what appeared to be a third supported in a sitting position by one of the others. In a moment she saw Lisle ride up directly to the circle of light, swing from his saddle and stride quickly toward the group, where he stood apparently in conversation.

Presently one of the other figures arose and came forward, silhouetting against the light. Barbara's heart leaped with relief and pleasure as she recognized the fringed outlines of the Indian woman.

Naomi was evidently going for her horse, and in

a moment was headed toward the place where Barbara waited.

As Lisle drew up before the group beside the fire he was relieved to see Naomi and Blake, and decidedly disappointed to observe that the man in the Sergeant's coat who leaned against Blake's knees was not Lord Harold.

Naomi's eyes expressed relief when she saw Lisle. Her anxiety for his safety had begun when Lord Harold had mentioned the "call" he had yet to make. When she had decided to warn Lisle of the outlaw's presence and had ridden silently off towards the campfire which she had believed to be his, only to find another man instead, her anxiety was deepened. And, when she heard the shots from the direction of the campfire to the right, she had felt the gravest fear.

She knew that the man sitting by his fire was an open target to whomever should choose to creep up behind him in the darkness, and she also knew that Lord Harold was perfectly aware that he was being trailed by the police, and was averse to no method, however cowardly, that would rid him of his pur-

suers. Moreover, one red coat was as much an enemy to him as another.

And when she did not find Lisle at the second campfire, her fears were by no means allayed.

"Clinton!" exclaimed Lisle as he strode forward.

"The same," said the wounded man thickly. "Plus two bullets an' minus about five quarts o' blood."

He spoke with difficulty. His thick underlip was thrust forward and his small pale eyes were glazed and watery.

"Lord Harold?" inquired Lisle.

"The same," repeated Clinton.

Lisle knelt and passed his hand across the man's forehead. "Where's your medical kit?" he asked.

"Here it is," said Blake, passing him a small, flat leather bag. "Just about to bandage him up."

The two men started to remove Clinton's coat, and Lisle turned to Naomi.

"You may go," he said, with a nod in the direction of Barbara, "we'll fix him up. There's someone waiting for you yonder."

The two men worked silently. When the bandaging had been completed and Clinton had been laid in his blankets, he seemed anxious to get something

off his mind. After a few labored outbursts consisting mostly of oaths concerning high-brow outlaws in general and Lord Harold in particular, he said,

" Damn son-of-a-gun walks outa space with two guns levelled at my head. Sits down as if he's goin' to spend the evenin'— says he's just been callin' on a beautiful lady an' he guesses he'll have a little chat with me before turnin' in. Says he also is needin' a razor blade — a safety — havin' just used up his last one — an' he guesses I'll probably be able to help 'im out."

The man paused for breath and shut his eyes a moment. Then he opened them again and proceeded.

" I tells him — to guess again. Says any razor blade he'd get from me — would be across 'is damn neck. Damn lizard shoves the guns closer an' says — he guesses again — that I'm — probably goin' to help him out!"

" Better sleep awhile," interrupted Lisle, " you can tell the rest later."

" Ain't a hell of a lot more to tell," said Clinton wearily, " guess there was — only one thing to do — an' that was to give 'im th' blade. As he was

slippin' it in 'is pocket I draws on 'im, thinkin' to s'prise 'im. But he ain't the bein' s'prised kind. He lets go an' so does I — an' he wins. An' what's worse, he gets away!"

" You're after him, aren't you?" asked Lisle.

" You're — damn right — I'm after 'im!"

Lisle turned to Blake.

" We can't leave him here alone," he said. " If you'll stay I'll go back and break camp and move us over."

" I was thinking about that," Blake replied, " and also of to-morrow. Your duty calls you to go on. I'll stay with him."

" Thanks," said Lisle. " I hope we won't have to arrange it that way, though. I don't mind saying I'd like your company. Anyway, we'll see when to-morrow comes."

Lisle rode back to where Barbara and Naomi waited for him.

As he supposed, Naomi had told the girl all she knew of the incident, which was that a young Sergeant who had come out on Lord Harold's trail had been shot by him.

She had given the reason for her own disappearance as being the result of her uneasiness caused by

the visit of the outlaw and the determination to see if he were still in the vicinity. The shots had attracted her to the campfire.

Silver, she said, had been gone when she left.

"I've kept my promise," said Lisle as he rode up to them. "He'll be all right in a few days. Blake says he'll stay with him."

"Blake!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Yes — fellow I found camping back of me to-night. Nice chap. Like to camp along with him for awhile — but I guess I can't very well stay back."

"Blake!" repeated Barbara under her breath. "How strange! — and yet," she thought, "it isn't an uncommon name. Roth — and Blake!"

The memory of Roth's name reminded her of the cardcase. She had forgotten to mention it to Lisle when she had told him of Lord Harold's visit.

"Just before Lord Harold came last night," she said, "I found a leather cardcase on the ground beside the fire. It had the name 'Herbert Roth' engraved on it."

"Roth!" exclaimed Lisle. She could barely see his face in the darkness, but she knew the name had had some significance.

"Do you suppose he might be the one of whom the outlaw spoke — the one with whom he had had the 'argument'?"

"It is quite likely," Lisle replied as his thoughts tumbled through his brain.

"Herbert Roth! The victim of Barbara's brother — Steve!"

Lisle gathered his reins.

"I must leave you now," he said. "I'm going to break camp and move over with Clinton and Blake for the night.

"By the way," he added turning to Barbara, "if you should need me — if there should be any more trouble — or unwelcome visitors, fire three shots — and I'll be on hand. And you," he said to Naomi, "had better stick to your post."

"Thank you," Barbara replied. "You will come again, to-morrow?"

"Indeed I will," said Lisle heartily. "I'll be there — early! Good-night!"

"Good-night," called Barbara as they turned away.

"Naomi," she asked presently as their horses walked side by side, "are they all like that?"

"Who, Mees?"

"The men of the North country."

Naomi smiled to herself in the darkness.

"No, Mees," she answered, "not all. Some are like Clinton — and others like Lord Harold."

"What is Clinton like?" asked the girl.

"He is like the man Harold, Mees, without the 'Lord' an' the beautiful nails — an' the beautiful teeth. Only deference that one is protect by red coat of law — an' other is hunt by it. Beneath they are alike!"

"But surely Clinton has never done any things such as are attributed to Lord Harold," said Barbara, "else he could not be a member of the police."

"He has not done them," replied the Indian woman, "but it is only because he does not dare!"

And strangely enough, it seemed to Barbara that there was a note of pride in her voice — such as mothers have been known to exhibit toward the daring deeds of a fearless, though wayward, son.

They rode the rest of the way in silence. As they neared the light from the red embers which remained of their fire, they saw the figure of Silver outlined against it, waiting for them.

Barbara slipped from her saddle and ran to him.

As she came the dog whined excitedly and pranced about something which lay on the ground in front of him. He made no advance to meet her, as though loath to leave the object.

Barbara stooped and picked it up. It was a red coat of the uniform of the police, with three gold stripes upon the sleeve. It was torn almost to shreds and dripping with blood!

For three months the searchers traveled on without discovering a trace of the object of their search.

Lisle, who, after camping near them for a glorious week following the night on which Clinton was shot, had ostensibly and regretfully taken his leave on the excuse of duty, and had dropped back to his appointed "mile to the rear and out of sight." He had little difficulty in hiding his campfire now, as the region through which they passed was almost continually mountainous.

During the week in which he camped near Barbara, his acquaintance with the girl strengthened into a strong friendship. They rode side by side during the days and sat together by the firelight in the evenings — and the girl's enthusiasm for, and quick appreciation of the things which made this

wild free country so dear to him, drew him to her as no mere physical beauty or grace of manner could have done. Her culture and refinement, along with her love of the elemental things, were a combination entirely rare, and utterly delightful to him.

To Barbara, when the seventh day of their journeying together brought with it the parting of their ways, it seemed like the end of a very lovely dream — the dream that had come to her when she had been riding with Danny on the hedged-in road — the dream in which the man who rode by her side had not been *quite* Danny, but someone who would want to ride on and on as she did, into that far rim where the earth met the sky.

And this man was like that. He had chosen this life because he had been attracted to it by the same things which had attracted her, and he would remain true to it, she knew, until the last spark of the life which flowed so vigorously within him was gone.

The last night of his stay with them was brilliant with stars and the light of a full moon. Lisle suggested that they walk to a point of rocks which afforded a beautiful view of the valley and the surrounding country below.

There was silence between them as they walked.

It was born of the subtle beauty of the silver touched vista before them and of the thought of the loneliness which would come to each of them with the dawn of the morrow.

To Lisle, this latter feeling was not so intense, because of his knowledge that he would be but a mile away from her, a knowledge Barbara did not share.

She realized the many varied courses through which what some choose to call the whims of Fate might lead them — and that there was more than a mere possibility that she might not see him again. And with the thought had come a depression which she struggled in vain to offset.

Lisle, in turn, was far more depressed than she, and for a far more unpleasant reason. This girl who had suddenly taken such a significant place in his thoughts, who loved the things he loved, and who walked beside him here in the moonlight with the glory of it shining on her hair and reflected in her eyes, was the sister of the man whose freedom and life he sought. And the manner of the seeking, would, he knew, when she should find it out, cause her to turn from him as from some poisonous thing — which had smiled at her — and had struck her as

it smiled. His intuition told him that the girl would never be able to understand, for, withal she was traveling a man's trail, with the courage and the purpose of a man, she was, first of all, and gloriously, a woman. And to a woman the eternal pinnacle of all things is love—and this includes the love of a brother—and to her there are no laws or oaths of any kind worthy to take its place.

And so it was with a heart overflowing with these thoughts unexpressed that Lisle's grave troubled eyes looked down upon the silent little figure beside him. The idea that he loved her did not occur to him. It was the strong firm bonds of their friendship which he longed to hold. But when they had come to the point of rocks and stood looking off into the moonlit touched grandeur at their feet, he suddenly found himself longing to gather her in his arms and tell her all, and beg her to try to understand!

The girl felt his eyes upon her and, turning suddenly, she looked up into them, her own filled with a scarcely concealed emotion, and impulsively she held out her hands to him.

"I—I wish you weren't going," she said softly. Lisle took the hands in his own—and it seemed

that he would crush them if he did not summon all his control. The girl swayed slightly toward him — and suddenly, all the rest of the world seemed to vanish except the two wide sweet eyes that looked into his and the lips so close to his own. In that moment they were but a man and a maid alone together in a silvered wilderness — and there was no oath or outlawed brother.

“Barbara!” he cried, “Barbara!”

Her arms were about his neck, and for one long moment their lips clung.

## CHAPTER FOUR

It was in the afternoon of the first day of October, which also was the first day of winter, when Barbara and Naomi drew up in front of Carey's General Merchandise Store at Ft. Wrigley.

They had passed over to the Mackenzie River, followed it down to Ft. Norman where they had crossed, and then on south across the Gravel and the Dahadinni.

During the last week they had encountered the first frost and chill winds which heralded the bitter months ahead, and Naomi had advised that they buy extra clothing in Ft. Wrigley before proceeding on their way back to Dawson.

It required considerable argument on Barbara's part to convince the Indian woman that the girl had no intention of going back to Dawson until her brother had been found. Some time before Naomi had admitted she had spent many a winter on the snow trails with dog-teams, and Barbara was there-

fore assured that she was bringing no unusual hardship upon the woman by persuading her to continue the search.

As for Barbara, she felt that her summer on the trail had put her in excellent condition for enduring the winter trip which she was determined to make. She remembered McLean's words concerning the bogs and marshes which were impassable in summer, and realizing that Naomi had taken care to avoid them then, was resolved that the winter should see them well traced.

Accordingly, the matter apparently having been settled, she agreed to fit out at Ft. Wrigley with such clothing and other articles as would be required for the time intervening between the frosts and the first real heavy snow. From here their plan was to follow still farther south, keeping within range of the scattered towns until they should find it necessary to purchase the dog-teams.

But secretly, Naomi was far from convinced. Her experience on the great snow-fields of the North country had been sufficient to cause her to doubt this girl's ability to endure the hardships and possible dangers which they would encounter, and she resolved to manage to see and talk with Lisle. She

knew that he would come to Ft. Wrigley shortly after their arrival, and would come to Carey's upon the same mission as their own. He would, however, contrive to keep out of sight of Barbara, and Naomi knew she must find some excuse for leaving the girl alone for a time.

The opportunity presented itself an hour after their arrival at the store. They had just finished making their last purchase, when Barbara was impelled by the first Post Office sign they had seen since the beginning of the journey, to write a letter to Danny. A pad and ink were secured, and Barbara sat down on the stool before the crude wooden shelf next to the caged window, which served as a desk. Silver, ever on guard, stretched himself at her feet.

"I go take horses for be shod," said Naomi.  
"Tawney limp a little."

"Yes," replied Barbara, "I noticed it. I'll write until you return."

Naomi left the horses at the little shed of the town blacksmith and proceeded quickly on foot to the end of the only street which gave access to the town on the west side. As she had anticipated, a solitary horseman was coming slowly across the open space beyond it, and as he drew nearer his coat glowed red

under the rays of the sun. Naomi went forward, holding up her hand as a signal of greeting, and Lisle, recognizing her, came on at a trot.

"She wills to go on," said Naomi, going at once to the point, as Lisle drew up beside her, "she not go back to Dawson."

Lisle frowned.

"It is as I thought," he said, "and feared, Where is she now?"

"Carey's."

Lisle sat silent looking off down the street toward the little store where Barbara was writing.

"I have say much not go," went on the Indian woman, "but white maid have Indian will."

"Have you tried refusing to go with her?" Lisle asked, his eyes unconsciously following the figure of a man who was climbing the steps of the store.

"Yes, but always she say she get willing squaw — or go alone."

There was a queer expression in Lisle's eyes. A fragment from his memory had crossed before them — a picture of a girl, with heavy dark hair clouding about her shoulders, standing before a tent in the dull glow of a dying campfire, one small hand holding a Browning gun, leveled — at him. And out of

the picture came the girl's voice, not very steady, but clear, "Who's there?"

"And that's just exactly what she would do," he muttered slowly. Then he turned his horse.

"There is no other way," he said. "I must talk with her and attempt to dissuade her. If I cannot, then—" he broke off and clattered down the road.

Barbara's letter to Danny was a description and summary of the journey up to their arrival at Ft. Wrigley. She explained to him the reason for the search and told him of her determination to continue it through the winter. The letter was entirely impersonal, except for the expression of the wish that he might have shared the enjoyments of the trip.

She told him about Lisle, but made no mention of her feeling for him—which had developed surprisingly since the night on the point of rocks—except what he might choose to guess from her description of his character and attributes. It was not necessary, she felt, to hurt Danny further than she had already done.

As she sat writing, a man came into the store and

went to the little caged window under the Post Office sign. He carried a package which he apparently intended to mail. The proprietor, slouched over a chair in front of the little red-hot stove, rose laboriously, spat a large brown cud into the box at his feet, and lumbered over to the counter. He regarded the man with the glance of quickened interest which was invariably accorded the none too frequent advent of a stranger.

Barbara glanced up quickly and then went on with her writing. There was nothing about the man to attract attention. He appeared like any of the other men she had seen on the street of the town. It was not until she heard Carey's voice say, "New York," as he repeated that portion of the address on the package, that her interest was aroused.

She looked up full into the eyes of the man who now stood staring at her with a strange expression. It was a weather-beaten face, and the rather kind brown eyes were lined about with many tiny wrinkles like those which have squinted much in the sun. He had a full beard and a rather too heavy mustache which hid the lines of his mouth, and his broad hat was pulled low over his forehead. But it was his startled expression as he looked at her

which caused Barbara to wonder. It was not merely the look of surprise at seeing a lovely and obviously well-bred girl in a place where white women seldom came. Instinctively Barbara felt that he was not even aware of these factors, but was disturbed either by having mistaken her for someone else, or by her resemblance to some one he had seen. He even opened his mouth as though impelled to speak, but as he did so the proprietor's voice came through the bars with startling suddenness.

"Robin Hood!" it said.

The man jumped as though struck, faced to the little gate — and the muzzle of the gun which was placed against it.

"Yuh made a mistake when yuh turned yer classic nose against yon light," came Carey's thick voice from behind the gun, "an' yuh can't fool me by sendin' yer damned booty to New York — although I admits I woulda bit quicker if it'd been Chicago!"

At the last word the man started violently again, and then his shoulders seemed to droop and he lowered his hands limply to his sides.

"You win," he said wearily. "I ain't got no comeback. On with the dance."

Carey's voice came again, thick, relentless.

"Yuh jest stand where yer standin' an' look right where yer lookin' an' if yuh bats an eyelash while I'm comin' outa this here cage, I'll fill you full o' what's comin' to yuh sooner er later anyway. Ther's jest as big a reward offered for yuh dead as livin'!"

The man made no effort to escape. He stood perfectly still while Carey lumbered, quickly for him, around the corner of the counter and shoved a gun up close to his captive's face.

"I hate to bother yuh, Miss," he said, "but this here tough weed o' the mountains is ripe fer pickin' — an' myself bein' otherwise engaged I must ask yuh kindly to go back o' that there barrel o' flour by the further counter an' fetch me a piece o' rope. So doin' yuh'll be renderin' a service to th' community."

Barbara had risen and stood watching the scene wide-eyed, one hand gripping the edge of the shelf. As she realized what Carey was asking her to do, a wave of rebellion rose up within her. There had been something, she knew not what, about the startled eyes of the man as he had looked at her that made her loath to assist in his capture.

"I — who is he? — what has he done?" she faltered, unconsciously sparring for time.

As she spoke, the sound of horse's hoofs clattered up to the door and a man's figure dropped to the steps. Before Carey could reply, Barbara gave a little gasp of surprise as the tall form of John Lisle filled the doorway.

Lisle strode forward to where Carey and the captured man stood. The former greeted him with boisterous pleasure.

"Well, I'll be gosh-darned golly-woggled if it ain't the law himself!" he cried. "Yer jest in time! Got 'im all cut out an' rounded up ready fer shippin'."

Lisle had nodded quickly to Barbara. To Carey he said,

"Who is he?"

"Who is he?" gurgled the thick voice, "an to think yuh don' know 'im! Take a look at yon placard, an' then turn this here gent's nose sideways to the light — an' I guess yuh'll know 'im all right, all right!"

The gloating pleasure of the man in his capture

made Barbara shudder. Instinctively she felt that of the two the prisoner was the better.

Lisle passed over to where a printed sheet hung on the wall. At the top of it were the words "\$200.00 REWARD!" and beneath the heading were two photograph cuts, one of a man's full face, the other of the profile. Barbara could not see what was printed below the cuts.

Lisle turned to the prisoner and studied him for a moment.

"Turn your profile to the light," he said.

The man obeyed.

"Are you 'Robin Hood'?" Lisle asked.

The man shook his head in the affirmative, and once more Barbara caught a glimpse of the deep, hopeless eyes — and again her sympathy rose within her. Surely the outlaws she had seen so far were extraordinarily unlike her former conception of them!

Lisle pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

"I arrest you in the name of His Majesty the King!" he said quietly as he clapped them on the wrists. Then turning to Barbara,

"I will be back in a few moments, will you wait?"

"Yes," replied the girl. With eyes brimming with a strange unaccountable emotion she watched Lisle and his prisoner pass through the doorway and on down the street, the drooping figure of the latter in striking contrast with the erect, squared shoulders in the red coat. The man had cast one last look at Barbara as he had left.

Carey rubbed his pudgy hands together and looked after them, his little eyes alight.

"Two hundred dollars!" he purred, "an' all fer keepin' my eyes peeled. An' it ain't the first 'un I've brought to the justice o' the law! No siree, it ain't!"

The justice of the law! The words rang strangely in Barbara's ears. The justice of the law! She looked at the old storekeeper smiling in deep satisfaction at the thought of the reward, and a wave of disgust passed over her.

"I wonder!" she thought.

She wanted to learn more about this "Robin Hood," but her dislike for Carey resolved her to wait and ask Lisle. Accordingly she sat down again and finished the letter to Danny.

Lisle returned in twenty minutes.

"I met Naomi yonder," he said as he held out his hand, "and she told me you were here. I'm mighty glad to see you again!"

"And I, to see you," replied Barbara, smiling up at him. "Isn't it strange that we should meet again? Our trails were not so distant after all, it seems."

"No," Lisle answered gravely, "they weren't."

"What have you done with your prisoner?"

"Locked him up."

Barbara drew a quick sigh and her eyes were troubled.

"I—I don't know just why," she said, "but I wish you hadn't had to. What has he done?"

"He's a queer one," replied Lisle, "another of the spectacular species, but not nearly so dangerous as Lord Harold. He's a robber, but it seems he robs only the rich — fur traders, and merchants who sometimes travel the mountain trails. And his booty, they say, he sends to addresses in the poor sections of Chicago. That's why he is called 'Robin Hood.' He has eluded the police for four years now. In fact, by the way, he was the man on whose trail your brother was last sent, and from which he did not return."

The mention of Steve reminded Lisle of why he had come.

"Naomi tells me you are determined to continue your search through the winter. I am most anxious to dissuade you. You cannot possibly realize what you are attempting. Strong men have failed."

Barbara's lips tightened a little.

"It is absolutely no use for you to undertake to dissuade me," she said firmly. "I mean to go."

Lisle's eyes held thoughts unexpressed as he looked at her. He longed to plead with her for his own sake, to beg her to give up the search until the summer months, but he did not dare.

"Won't you — trust the search to me?" he asked.

"To you?" repeated Barbara, surprised, "but you have your own commission — and besides," she added, "Silver would not go with you, and it is on him I am depending to find Steve. No. I could not trust this search — even to you."

Lisle made a quick decision.

"Miss Barrows," he said earnestly, lowering his voice so as to be out of earshot of Carey, "I feel that I must go against orders to the extent of telling you that my commission is already the same as yours — that I, too, am in search of your brother.

McLean would want me to tell you now, I'm sure, if it would thereby be possible to swerve you from your course. *Now* won't you trust the search to me?

"Perhaps," he added, "you could train Silver to go with me."

Barbara was staring at him wide eyed.

"But — I don't understand!" she exclaimed.  
"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"There were reasons why I could not," replied Lisle, a deep flush mounting to his hair.

"And — the reasons?"

"I can't tell you. I'm under orders."

Barbara's eyes narrowed slightly.

"I can't imagine what reasons there could be for having kept the fact from me," she said, "but if you will not tell me I suppose I shall have to remain in ignorance. Nevertheless, I can't say that I like it. Neither will it alter my purpose, in the least!"

There was no mistaking the resolution in her voice and manner. Lisle felt a faint tremor at the chill in her tone which was unmistakably meant for him.

"I am sorry," he said, "*very* sorry. I would

tell you if I could. I wish that you might believe that, no matter what may happen."

There was a wistful expression in his deep grey eyes as he said it, which was not lost on the girl. She lowered her own that he might not see them soften, but she did not reply.

The pause was interrupted by the voice of Carey. He was peering over the top of a newspaper and a pair of rimmed spectacles from his chair by the stove.

"Storm comin'," he said.

Lisle straightened and turned.

"So?" he said. "Early, eh?"

"Yeh. Paper's four days old an' it wuz headin' down from Ft. Yukon then. Oughta be here pretty nigh. How about thet reward?"

"You'll get it."

"When?"

"Soon as I can get it here from Dawson. I'll report to-day."

Carey laid down his paper.

"Ink's right there," he said, "guess th' young lady's through with it, ain't yuh, Miss?"

Barbara nodded, and crossed to look out of the door.

Lisle half smiled at the man's impatience and went over to the wooden shelf. Barbara's letter to Danny still lay there, in the envelope and addressed.

"Do you wish this posted?" Lisle called to her.

"Please," she replied.

As he picked it up, Lisle started violently, and a puzzled expression came into his eyes as they were drawn to the name written across it.

"Good God!" he exclaimed to himself, looking again to make sure. Then recovering himself quickly, he asked Carey for stamps.

He wrote a short report to McLean, including the request for the reward, and mailed the letter. But Barbara's letter to Danny, he slipped into his pocket!

"I think there is indeed a storm coming," said Barbara from the doorway, "it is clouding up considerably toward the northwest."

Lisle crossed and looked at the threatening sky.

"Looks so," he said, and then added, "Better take a couple of rooms here until to-morrow, at least. You may find you will need things which you have not purchased, if the storm continues long."

Mrs. Carey will look after you. It's the only place in town."

Barbara decided to accept the suggestion, and accordingly, Carey called his wife, who led the girl to a large comfortable looking room in the rear of the building.

"I'll come back later," Lisle had said as he left.

Behind the little caged door in the store, Carey was reading once more the address on the package which "Robin Hood" would never mail.

"'Nother of his poor lady frien's, I s'pose," he chuckled as he tossed it into a corner under the desk.

The package was addressed to

"Miss Barbara Barrows,  
1730 Riverside Drive,  
New York City."

The threatened storm hurled into Ft. Wrigley with a great roaring of wind and a blinding drive of snow.

In spite of the fact that she lay in a bed for the first time in months, and a comfortable one at that, Barbara could not sleep. She had been able to open only one of the two windows in the room, and that

but a few inches on account of the oblique slant of the storm, and the stuffiness, along with the unaccustomed sound of rattling windows, disturbed her.

As she lay with her eyes closed her thoughts were mostly of Lisle. Why could he not tell his reasons for having kept from her the fact that he, also, was on the trail of Steve? Surely there was no need for such secrecy. McLean had told her that he intended to send someone out on her brother's trail again, and now that she recollects, he had mentioned Lisle's name in that connection, although she had forgotten the fact.

Her thoughts went back to her first meeting with Lisle on the plains. He had come very quickly after he had heard the shots — and the fire — the campfire that had so often attracted her — the one which had been always just about the same distance to their rear!

Suddenly the full significance of the idea struck her, and her eyes flew open, staring into the intense darkness of the room. It was Lisle's fire! She was sure of it now! Lisle had been camping on her trail from the start! Under orders! She remembered his words and the wistful look which had accompanied them.

"I would tell you if I could," he had said, "and no matter what may happen, I would like you to believe that!"

So McLean had sent Lisle out to follow her — to protect her probably, and while she had believed herself to be trailing Steve practically alone, and had been secretly somewhat pleased with herself for doing so, she had been carefully provided with a protector! She chuckled softly at the thought. It was funny!

And *such* a protector! Before her inward vision stood his image — six feet two, at least, of stalwart, vigorous man! Somehow she could not seem to imagine a circumstance or a danger which he would not be able to meet. There was not even the *capacity* for fear in those fine grey eyes, she thought, and surely those powerful arms were equal to any emergency. Strangely enough, with the thought of the arms came the memory of the night on the point of rocks. She had felt the arms of her protector about her then, and had heard his voice calling her name — her *first* name — and had felt his kiss. A thrill passed through her at the sweet memory. The arms of her protector! And his kiss!

"B. B.," she murmured softly to herself, "you're

falling — falling — falling in love, and you might as well admit it!"

Instead of abating on the second day, the storm increased. Two feet of snow had already fallen and it was still coming down, more evenly, and less inclined to drift.

"Looks like we're in for it," Mrs. Carey remarked, peering through the heavily frosted window of the dining room as she carried out some of the breakfast dishes. Mrs. Carey was a decided improvement on Mr. Carey, Barbara thought. She was much smaller, her eyes were larger and very pleasant to look at, and except for the habit of effacing herself almost completely in the presence of her overly corpulent husband, she was very likable indeed.

Lisle was of the same opinion as Mrs. Carey when he called to see Barbara about eleven o'clock.

"I'm afraid we're stuck here for awhile," he said.

"We?" inquired Barbara, with a mischievous smile.

"All of that," replied Lisle, catching the smile, without, however, guessing its real meaning, and returning it in kind.

"I'm not prepared for this kind of weather,

either," he went on, "and besides, I'm not going until I see that you are properly started. You may need dog-teams if this keeps up, in which case I'd like to select your dogs — and your outfit, if you'll permit me. That's a very important part of your quest."

"I realize that," replied Barbara, "and I shall be very pleased to have you do the selecting. For once I will not be stubborn," she finished, smiling.

She had resolved not to tell Lisle of her calculations of the night before. She knew that she could not forbid him to follow on her trail, and she was not at all sure that she wanted to. After all, it was rather a comfortable feeling to know that he would be near her through the coming journey, and that the ostensible parting at Ft. Wrigley would not carry with it the feelings of regret and loneliness which had accompanied the one on the plains. Also, it rather added spice to the adventure to allow him to believe her still ignorant of his nearness. She could not resist, however, an occasional thrust which would make it necessary for him to parry, and cause the inevitable flush to mount again. He was not a good deceiver.

"Which way are you going, when you leave Ft.

Wrigley?" she asked, looking him squarely in the eyes.

The flush appeared, as she had expected it would — but his eyes did not shift, possibly because his reply was the absolute truth.

"I don't know — yet," he answered.

Lisle was right — they were "stuck" in Ft. Wrigley for a week, during which it snowed almost continually. Finally, on the sixth day, the sun appeared once more in blinding splendor on the glistening, white-packed country.

There was no question now about the mode of travel which must be used, and Lisle spent the day in bargaining with half-breed owners of huskies, and in purchasing furs, snowshoes, provisions and fuel. The horses were sold, much to Barbara's extreme regret, as she had become greatly attached to Tawney, the pretty mare which had carried her thus far.

Barbara and Naomi purchased their moccasins and other necessary details of their attire, and early the next morning the dogs were harnessed, the loads packed on the sleds, and the two women stood on the store porch bundled in their furs, waiting for Lisle to finish buckling the last strap into place.

Barbara had been obliged to put Silver on leash, as his enmity against the sled-dogs was immediate and intense.

As they stood waiting, a horse and rider came around the corner of what six days before had been a street, but which was now a slanting snow-drift. The man wore the uniform of the police. The horse struggled through the deep snow, seeming to make scarcely more than an inch of headway at a time. It was evident that both horse and rider were completely exhausted. As they drew nearer, the man's face beneath the broad hat looked drawn and haggard.

There was something familiar to Barbara about the man, even at that distance, and as he drew nearer she stared at him intently, trying to place him. Just then he saw the group on the porch steps, and as though the sight had assured him that help was near, and he need no longer hold on to the last spark of endurance which was left in him, he pitched forward across his horse's neck.

Lisle got him down to the steps, and into a sitting position, then he gently pulled the drooping head back across his knee. As he did so, he uttered a startled exclamation.

"Clinton!" he cried.

Barbara had clutched Naomi's arm for support, and as she stared at the unconscious man her face was as deathly white as the snow which lay about them.

"Herbert Roth!" she gasped.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Barbara and Naomi started out as they had planned, and Lisle put Clinton to bed in the room Naomi had occupied at Carey's. He told the Indian woman that he would follow as soon as he had arranged with Mrs. Carey to care for the exhausted man.

Lisle had been too busy tending Clinton to be questioned by Barbara concerning the man's identity, so she determined to find out what she could from Naomi. She was certain that the man was Herbert Roth, although he was evidently masquerading under the name of Clinton. She did not know that the dead body of Herbert Roth had been brought into Dawson fully a year after Clinton had joined the force, and if she had known it, the fact would only have added to, rather than subtracted from, her mystification.

Lisle found that Clinton was only thoroughly exhausted and in need of complete relaxation and sleep, and when the man regained consciousness, Lisle learned that there was someone in far greater

need out on the edge of the town in the snow.

He put on a pair of snowshoes, took a small flask of whiskey, and hurried in the direction from which Clinton had come. He had gone but two hundred yards beyond the turn by the store, when he saw directly ahead of him, a lone horse standing riderless, the end of the reins tangled about and raising grotesquely the foot of a figure which lay in the snow beside it. The horse saw Lisle and whinnied softly, but the fallen man did not move.

It was Blake, the tenderfoot, who lay limp and unconscious beside the horse which had brought him through the storm to Ft. Wrigley. The animal was not so exhausted as Clinton's had been. It had probably received better treatment, Lisle thought as he lifted the limp form and laid it across the saddle, propping the drooping head with his right arm, and gathering the reins in his left. But the man himself was far more exhausted than Clinton. He had not the hardy physique to begin with, nor the power of endurance which comes only by continual contact with the elements, and as Lisle laid him upon the bed in the room which Barbara had just vacated, the grey eyes of the young officer were troubled.

"Poor kid," he said compassionately, as he looked

at the wan unconscious face, thinner by far than when he had last seen it, and lined with unmistakable signs of suffering, both mental and physical. He looked indeed like a mere boy in spite of this, however, perhaps because of the sensitiveness of his fine features, the wistful line of his mouth.

Mrs. Carey fluttered to and fro with water and towels, ice and ammonia, while Lisle endeavored to bring Blake back to consciousness.

"Poor dear, poor dear!" she kept murmuring softly, "he's that thin—an' beautiful! It don't seem he had any business comin' up to this here country anyway, it don't. It's certain he don't belong here—poor dear!"

Lisle did not smile at the term "beautiful" as applied to Blake by Mrs. Carey. He could see very plainly what she meant. There was nothing effeminate about Blake's features, but they were stamped with a certain nobility of expression, something almost too subtle to be analyzed, whether they were in action or in repose. Lisle had noticed it before when he and Blake had talked together by the campfire on the plains.

"No," said Lisle, "I guess he doesn't—belong here, but we've got to fix him so he can, if he wants

to — and I think he does.” There was a peculiar undercurrent of meaning to Lisle’s last words, which, however, was entirely lost upon Mrs. Carey.

“ Well!” she exclaimed, with the inflection of all the motherly protection which it had been denied her to lavish upon a son of her own, “ he ain’t goin’ outa here till he’s fit fer it, an’ *outfit* fer it, too. Men as is strong like you — an’ him in there, why that’s all right!”

Lisle smiled up at her.

“ I’m glad you feel that way,” he said earnestly. “ I have personal reasons why I particularly want this man well taken care of, and as I am obliged to go on to-day, it relieves me to know that he will be in good hands. By the way,” he added, “ has the mail gone out yet?”

“ No,” replied Mrs. Carey, “ it’s late on ‘count o’ the storm. It ain’t goin’ out now till afternoon.”

“ Good. I put a letter into the slide this morning which I should like to have back again. It was addressed to

Mr. Daniel Blake,  
27 Morningside Park West,  
New York City.

“ Will you get it for me?”

Lisle had slipped Barbara's letter to "Danny" Blake into his pocket because he believed there was a possibility of his seeing the man before he left Ft. Wrigley. He had been convinced that the Daniel Blake he had met on the plains, and the one to whom Barbara had written were one and the same. Blake's reticence concerning his mission in the far north, his wistful, yearning expression when he had spoken of it, had all come back to Lisle as he had looked at the name on Barbara's letter. Blake was obviously of Barbara's social standing, and altogether a man by whom such a girl as she might be attracted. Lisle had met few men that he would have considered eligible as such, but of that few Blake was easily the most worthy.

He had not the slightest doubt now but what Blake was following Barbara because he loved her. The expression in the man's eyes when he had mentioned his quest would have been sufficient to convince Lisle of that, and the fact that he could not imagine anyone knowing her and *not* loving her, sealed the conviction. He knew that he himself would have followed her to the ends of the earth if it were not for the barriers which stood between them.

That Blake was one of these barriers was more than likely, but after all, it was of little consequence in the ultimate outcome of things. Lisle knew that he himself could never occupy a place in Barbara's life other than that of a friend, and even that but for a little while longer, as each day was bringing them nearer the end of the search which would mean her disillusionment — and undoubtedly, in consequence, her enmity.

Whether or not Barbara was in love with Blake, Lisle did not attempt to determine. The night on the point of rocks when he had held her in his arms, had looked close into the glory of her eyes and felt the touch of her soft lips, had left no doubt concerning his own feeling. But what was to him the realization of a great love, may have been to her but the momentary effect of the enchantment of the moonlit night, combined with her isolation from other men. The kiss, he knew, might have meant nothing more than the impulsive expression of sorrow at being separated from a friend. And aside from all this, even though she might after all, by some miraculous decree of heaven, love him, his oath, and the manner of its fulfillment would make it impossible for him ever to claim her.

Accordingly, Lisle faced the facts of the situation with the determination that he would at least consecrate his love to the service of its object, and that he would do the utmost in his power to help the man who also loved her, and whom it was quite possible she loved in return.

He had figured that Clinton would be able to travel in but a few days after the shooting on the plains, and feeling instinctively that Blake would not prefer the coarseness of Clinton to his own at least more refined company, Lisle had believed that Blake would make an effort to overtake him. When the storm had continued, however, he had at last decided that Blake would not reach Ft. Wrigley before the search for Steve was resumed, therefore he had mailed Barbara's letter, realizing, of course, that he had no right to hold it longer even in hope of encountering the one to whom it was addressed.

Blake regained consciousness after an hour more of coma. He recognized Lisle at once and the expression of pleasure which lit up his wan features and haggard eyes, touched Lisle deeply. Blake was too weak to speak at first, but after a few moments he murmured,

“Gee! but — I’m glad — it’s you!”

Lisle drew a quick breath at the words which were so like those with which Barbara had first greeted him on the plains. Surely the hand of Fate was playing strangely!

"So am I," he replied now, as then, "and I'm mighty glad also that you are still *you!*"

Blake smiled faintly.

"Almost — wasn't," he murmured. Then he asked, "Where's Clinton?"

"In there," replied Lisle, nodding toward the next room, "he's all right. Some sleep will fix him."

The man on the bed closed his eyes. Sleep was what he needed, too, and it was quickly coming upon him.

Blake slept straight through until six o'clock. In the meantime, Lisle had finished fitting himself out for the journey ahead, and after a half hour of thought had taken an option on four extra dogs, two extra sleds, and an extra hooded fur coat. The understanding was that he could return them if he decided he would not need them.

He knew that Barbara and Naomi would travel very slowly at first, as Barbara had expressed her determination to mush behind the sleds sometimes,

instead of riding continually, and Naomi would have to get accustomed to handling the dogs. Lisle would have little trouble in catching up to his appointed post behind them, providing he could get started by nightfall and their trail would be easily followed as it was unlikely that any other teams would be leaving the town in that direction. Naomi's plan was to proceed straight east, circle south and cover the low swampy region impassable in the summer.

When Blake awoke, Mrs. Carey called Lisle in from the store where he had been waiting.

"He's askin' fer yuh," she said.

"Was afraid you'd — gone," said Blake with obvious relief, as Lisle came into the room, and closed the door behind him.

"Not yet," Lisle replied, "but I'll have to go soon. I wanted to see you first. Are you strong enough to — talk a little?"

"You bet," Blake answered. "I feel — much better, and it won't be long — before I can — start out — again. I was hoping —" he stopped, as though wondering how Lisle would take what he was hoping, but Lisle had already guessed what he had been about to say.

" You were hoping you could go with me?" he asked. " Well," reflectively, " perhaps you can. We'll see.

" I have something here which I believe belongs to you," he went on, taking the letter out of his pocket. " It was given to me to stamp and post, and I couldn't help but see the name."

Blake took the envelope in trembling fingers. For a long moment he stared at it, his expression slowly changing from surprise to the one Lisle had seen on his face that night on the plains. It left no doubt whatever of the identity of the man, and the reason for his quest in the far north.

Lisle turned and went quietly out, leaving Blake to read the letter from the girl they both loved.

When he re-entered to Blake's " Come in," twenty minutes later, the man on the bed reached out and grasped Lisle's hand in a grip surprisingly strong.

" Thanks, Lisle," he said simply, while his eyes spoke the feeling behind the words. " I might have known — you were — the one! They wouldn't have sent *him* — with *her*!"

Lisle knew that Blake referred to Clinton, and he thought of the narrow escape the man's fears had

had from being justified. If it hadn't been for the shadows on the snow!

"They told you, then, at headquarters?" Lisle asked.

"Yes," replied Blake, "Commissioner McLean told me she had gone—and why—and that some one had been sent to follow behind her—as protection."

The last word convinced Lisle that Blake did not know the other reason for his trailing Barbara. Of course McLean would not have told him.

"Where is she—now?" asked Blake.

"Not very far away," replied Lisle. "She started this morning due east, and I intended to follow at once, but was waiting until you could talk with me. They will travel slowly and I can easily overtake them, and I wanted to find out what you intended to do."

The man on the bed smiled wanly. There was an expression in his eyes at which Lisle wondered, in one so unused to the grimness of life.

"I'm going to—follow on!" Blake said.

"I was rather afraid you'd want to do that," said Lisle, "and I took the liberty of providing for it. But I would dissuade you if I could. This journey

is not one for a man in your condition. Won't you trust her — to me? I'll promise to bring her back to you — safe."

Blake shook his head sadly.

"I would trust her to you," he said, "it isn't that. But I — I can't. I want to go on — to be near her, at least. There isn't anything else in the world — that I *do* want!"

"Very well," said Lisle quietly, accepting the decision as final. "Then I will wait for you. If I didn't you'd try to make it before you're able, and this way you can keep still — and warm, and leave the rest to me. It isn't the best thing that could happen to you by any means, but it's a good deal better than what you'd choose as an alternative. You can't go to-night — we'll have to wait till morning — and mush through the next night until we catch them."

Blake's gratitude shone from his eyes.

"You're — all wool and a yard wide!" he cried, then added, earnestly,

"You haven't any idea, old man, what you're doing for me!"

"Perhaps — I have," replied Lisle, and for a moment their eyes met in that silent understanding

which comes sometimes into the lives of men who are cast in a mold too big for petty jealousies — an understanding which serves to bind them together with bonds stronger even than friendship — the mutual, silent acknowledgment of a great love — for the same woman.

Early in the icy dawn of the next day, Lisle bundled Blake into the extra coat which he had provided, harnessed the dogs, and drove out of Ft. Wrigley due east. He preferred to drive, himself, to hiring a half-breed for the purpose.

Clinton was still asleep when they were ready to go, so Lisle left him to the care of Mrs. Carey, who plainly showed her disappointment at having to care for him instead of Blake, toward whom she still exhibited an overwhelming motherly interest.

The snow was hard packed and the team moved easily over the light crust, Lisle traveling without the aid of snowshoes, which would have greatly reduced his rate of speed. He was lightly clad, in woolens instead of furs, to insure greater freedom of action, and the exercise of running beside the sled would keep him warm enough except in the colder weather to come.

Blake was noticeably brighter, and towards noon he began to take an eager, boyish interest in his adventure which had heretofore appeared to him so hopeless. After all, Barbara was not far away, and every pull of the lively huskies, which ran with ears and tails erect, was bringing them nearer to her. They had had no difficulty in finding the tracks of Barbara's team which were the only ones leading out of Ft. Wrigley in that direction.

Blake would have refrained from eating, when the sun was high in the heavens, that they might keep moving, but Lisle said,

" You're not well, yet, you know,— and I'm not sick — two very good reasons why we should both eat. Besides, we'll only lose an hour or so, and we'll make it up to-night. There'll be a full moon."

But Blake ate little.

" I don't know what's the matter with me," he said apologetically, " I can't seem to eat — this kind of food. I've been thoroughly spoiled, I guess."

" Just another sign of the tenderfoot," laughed Lisle. " You'll get over it. If you had to eat caribou steak and nothing else, for months at a time, a can of beans would taste like heaven, and as for bacon — *umm!* "

Blake looked unconvinced.

"I'd probably die of starvation before I'd eat it," he said. "There are some things I just can't seem to do, and eat food I don't like is one of them. I wish to heaven I'd been brought up on beans and bacon — now."

"Just wait 'til you get hungry enough," said Lisle.

Blake shook his head.

"I was hungry," he said, "out there — in the storm. Of course we weren't expecting it — so early — and we didn't have many provisions left — and what we had I just couldn't seem to eat. Clinton shot a snowbird and one wild duck and I guess what I ate of those was about all I got away with that week — except coffee."

"No wonder you were all in!" said Lisle. He was thinking — wondering if, after all, some men could be made to fit into this life he loved. He had thought, up to now, that it was just a matter of training, and sojourn. But there was Barbara, a woman of Blake's own world, about on a par with him physically — for Blake was no weakling despite his slimness — who had seemed to slip into the life naturally, and with a love of it and a capacity for meet-

ing its emergencies, that was equal to, and even surpassed, that of some of the women born and bred in the midst of it. He had not the slightest doubt but what, barring unlooked for circumstances, she would suffer no ill affects from the winter trip, and there was no question in his mind but what she would thoroughly enjoy it. It seemed as though there was, indeed, something which was born and bred in the blood of some men, and which others, no less men for the lack of it, did not possess. Lisle did not give this thing a name—he did not think of it in such a tangible way as that. But Blake could have named it, if he had known Lisle's thoughts. He would have quoted from a letter which he had read in a spring twilight five months before—that twilight which had seemed to take with it everything that had made Blake's life lovely. He would have called it the "tang"—the tang of the great grey spaces.

Lisle was well tired out by supper time, but he felt better after the short rest and the food, and they started on by the light of a full moon. He promised Blake a rabbit stew for the morrow as he realized he would be obliged to find something to the

man's liking, else the much needed strength would not be regained. Accordingly he kept looking for the little flat tracks.

He was not disappointed at seeing no sign of Barbara's camp-fire ahead, as he hardly expected to come near enough for that until midnight, at least.

Blake was standing the trip pretty well, and went to sleep an hour after their night mush had begun — and the dogs were still eager for the traces, owing to their long term of inaction during the summer.

Lisle lessened the strain on himself to a small degree by riding atop the rear sled on occasions. As they glided on, with only the sound of the pulling and breathing of the dogs, the faint squeak of the leather thongs of the harness, the soft slide of the sled runners, and the occasional crack of the long whip, Lisle tingled with the thrill of it. It was indeed wonderful, this life which he had chosen — and which he would never forsake — and for the moment even the pain of the hopeless circumstances surrounding his love for Barbara seemed to diminish beside it. There was deep sympathy and compassion in his heart as he thought of the man who slept in the other sled — the man who loved as he loved, but who, if indeed his love was hopeless, too, had

not this thing to comfort him in his sorrow — this other love — the love of the Siren of the North. And Lisle resolved once more that he would do all in his power to help this man and the girl they both loved, and from whom, to Blake there was no oath to bar the way.

At midnight there was still no sign of the light which they sought. Lisle was now tired and the dogs showed visible signs of fatigue. Lisle felt that it would be cruelty to push them farther without some rest, so he resolved to stop for a few hours. He did not release them from their traces.

In order that he might not go to sleep, he busied himself with making a fire and heating a can of soup. Blake awakened, from the cessation of the movement of the sled, and as he was feeling cramped, Lisle helped him on to some blankets which were stretched before the fire.

“No light?” asked Blake.

“Not yet,” replied Lisle, “they’re friskier than I thought they’d be. I suppose it was hard to hold the dogs down. We ought to sight them before dawn, but their fire may be out, of course, which won’t help us much.”

Blake looked at Lisle’s tired eyes.

"You need rest," he said. "I've had enough and to spare. Go to sleep and I'll call you whenever you say."

"Well," said Lisle, "if you feel awake, all right. Make it two hours. The dogs ought to be fairly rested by then.

"By the way," he added, "if ever you should hear three shots, no matter how far distant, be sure and tell me in case I don't hear them. That's her signal for help."

At the end of two hours they started on, the dogs somewhat loath to rouse themselves after so little rest. Lisle gave them each an extra frozen fish and talked to them coaxingly, until they seemed to sense that this master, who was unusually kind, who seldom touched them with the long whip which cracked over their heads, was calling upon them, for some strange reason, to serve him to the utmost of their strength. And because he was kind, and they had known so little of kindness, they threw themselves against their traces and struggled bravely on. They knew also that they followed always in the scent of other dogs, and they realized vaguely that this master wished to overtake those others.

As Lisle had anticipated, dawn came with still

no sign of the light, but he knew that Barbara could not be a great distance ahead. About three o'clock they had passed what had evidently been her camp of noon of the day before, and Lisle knew she could not make more than twenty miles per day at the most.

At six o'clock they stopped for breakfast, and Lisle had once more to coax and encourage the tired dogs to take the trail again. They moved with lagging steps now, and each pull was a visible effort. Lisle snapped the whip seldom, calling to them instead, urging them on in kind, even tones, and again the animals seemed to understand that their duty was to overtake before they rested again, the dogs whose scent they followed. Besides, this master gave them extra fish, and they knew there is always a reason for that.

About dawn, Lisle sighted a dark moving speck ahead, and for a moment he believed they had at last sighted their object, but when it grew larger, he knew that it was coming toward them. Presently he could see that it was not the long, low line of a team and driver. It was either a herd of caribou, late on their way to the protection of the woods to the south, or musk-oxen.

Lisle and Blake were traveling up wind, and when

the herd came to within a mile of them, it swung suddenly south and moved rapidly away.

"Musk-oxen," said Lisle in reply to Blake's query, "they travel in herds of from six to a hundred or so. There were about thirty to forty in that bunch."

"Ever hunt them?" asked Blake.

"Can't say I have," replied Lisle, "they aren't particularly good food."

Blake looked up quickly and then checked whatever he was about to say. He had hunted many times for the mere sport, and the matter of his game being good for food, or just to be stuffed and hung on some wall as a trophy, had been an indifferent issue. He had never needed to hunt for food.

"Funny. I guess I never thought much about that," he said five minutes later.

"About what?" asked Lisle, who had forgotten the incident.

"Killing for food — or otherwise," replied Blake. "I guess you sort of get next to things up here, more than we do at home."

"We live with them," Lisle said simply. "You wouldn't kill your neighbor, except in self-defense — and they're our neighbors, and better ones, I take

it, than some of yours — I mean all of them, not only the oxen. Even the wolves kill only when they're hungry — and that's self-defense. It's a sort of law — the law of the wild."

The law of the wild! If Lisle had known of the incident of Barbara and the bear, he might have wondered again at the difference in the breed of men — and women. For Blake, by no means inclined toward cruelty, evidently a keen sportsman, had had to have this law explained to him, and Barbara had learned it in just one long look at a big brown bear — and a little brown cub!

Blake was further interested a little farther on by the appearance of a series of well-marked, full length tracks, which gave evidence of being a long bound apart, which Lisle said were the tracks of otters, leading across country from Greasy Lake to Lake La Marte.

"But surely you hunt those, do you not?" asked Blake. "Their furs bring a good price in the market."

"The trappers hunt them," replied Lisle, "that's their profession."

An hour later, the third example of this law of the wild was brought home to Blake.

They were passing around the foot of a small bluff which was dotted here and there with clumps of spruce. Suddenly there appeared on the slope a scarcely perceptible moving speck.

"Took-too!" said Lisle, stopping the dogs. "Eskimo for buck reindeer," he explained, smiling.

The caribou had not seen them. He came nearer, around the slope, a beautiful white creature, with branching antlers. He moved quickly; it would have required a good shot indeed to have hit him as he went, but Lisle suddenly emitted a peculiar hissing call, somewhat like the spitting of a cat, and the buck stopped instantly.

"Eskimo for 'stop while I shoot you,'" laughed Lisle softly, as he started the dogs again.

With the movement the buck saw them and plunged out of sight around the bluff. But in that moment he had been an easy target for the man who had fooled him with the hissing call, if Lisle had chosen to take advantage of it.

Blake turned this law of the wild over in his mind for a moment. Finally he said,

"Funny how I never thought of it that way before. It's rather like meeting a friend in the wilder-

ness, when you get near one like that, out here, isn't it? I believe if I'd been alone then, I'd have felt the same way I did when you came to my fire on the plains that night. And Heaven knows that was anything but the desire to shoot you!"

They both laughed.

" You've got the idea," said Lisle.

Suddenly Blake was reminded of something.

" At that, it seems all men up here don't go by your law," he said. " Clinton told me he had been delayed two days two hundred miles out from Dawson, tracking down a she bear and a cub."

" No," replied Lisle gravely, " all men — don't. Did he get her?"

" No," replied Blake, " she was too slick for him, I guess, so he gave it up. He said some one had evidently been there before him, as she had one frayed ear."

It was high noon when Lisle caught sight of the dark speck which he felt certain was Barbara's team. It was four miles ahead and directly in line with the tracks. As it was not moving, Lisle concluded that they had stopped for lunch, so he proceeded to do likewise. He felt that at last he had reached his

"post" and as the "mile to the rear" would have to be extended to four, owing to their being visible from a greater distance on the snow.

Again the dogs were not unharnessed, for there was yet a half day's journey to be made.

As they sat resting after the meal, Lisle's eyes keeping watch of the speck ahead, a snowshoe rabbit suddenly appeared from behind a piece of snow-laden scrub, and stopped dead still at the unexpected sight of the campers. Quick as a flash, Lisle whipped out his gun and fired, and the little creature dropped in the tracks of its flying retreat.

"Your dinner," said Lisle to Blake as he brought it back. "You can't live on soup."

He cleaned and packed the rabbit and then opened his gun.

"Guess I'll keep her filled," he said as he opened one of the pockets of his cartridge belt and filled the empty chamber.

Suddenly he stopped still.

"How many shots have you?" he asked Blake.

"Five. I haven't used any."

"Any extras?"

"No. Clinton used them. I had intended to stock up in Ft. Wrigley."

Lisle drew a long breath and put his gun back in the holster.

"So had I," he said slowly, "and I left it on the counter at Carey's. We've got eleven shots to see us through — perhaps the winter!"

"*I'm a fine protector, I am!*" he added savagely.

Lisle was more fully convinced of his shortcomings as dependable protection before the sun set.

About three o'clock they came to the tracks of another team which had crossed the one he had been following, and which had apparently gone on due southeast. There was a slight delay here, owing to the fact that a camp had been made directly on the fork of the tracks, and the resulting confusion of the tracks prompted Lisle to investigate them closely upon their continuance, that he might make no mistake in following the ones which were in line with their own. The black speck had passed out of sight, as Lisle's dogs were too weary to keep the distance between them.

The stranger team had evidently included a brace of nine dogs, harnessed singly, as had Barbara's, and it was impossible to determine the number of sleds by means of the tracks. Lisle studied the foot-

prints and discovered that those of the driver were the only ones visible in each case. There was no sign of Silver's tracks, on either trail, a fact which puzzled Lisle considerably.

Finally, taking it for granted that the Indian woman's feet would make the smaller tracks, and finding that those proceeded on in his direction, Lisle swung the dogs on again.

It was dark at six o'clock, and Lisle's heart gave a bound of relief as he caught sight of a tiny spot of light far ahead of them. He drove two miles farther, and then assured that he was at his temporary destination at last, he made camp, unharnessed and fed the dogs, stewed the rabbit, of which Blake ate heartily, and dropped into his blankets for a much needed sleep.

The sun was up when Blake called him in the morning.

"Thought I'd better get you up," he laughed, "or you'd probably sleep all day. The Lord knows you need it, but I knew you didn't want it."

"I should say I didn't!" said Lisle, jumping up and peering ahead through blurred eyes.

"They've gone," said Blake, "that's why I called you."

Lisle hurried the preparations for breakfast, and they were soon once more on the way.

It was eight o'clock when they came to the place in which the pursued had made camp. Lisle suddenly halted the dogs as something which was lying on the burned remains of the fire-brands caught his eye. He went over and picked it up and stood looking at it, his back to Blake. When he turned, Blake was startled at the expression on the other's face.

"The bowl of a broken pipe," said Lisle as he held the thing out for Blake to see, "and *Naomi doesn't smoke!*"

## CHAPTER SIX

The feelings of Lisle and Blake as they crossed the snow toward the direction the other team had taken were hardly conducive to conversation. Lisle's were a mixture of the deepest self-condemnation and anxiety, and Blake felt that he himself had been the initial cause of the situation, in holding Lisle back at Ft. Wrigley.

The thought that Barbara might be in immediate danger did not trouble Lisle considerably. He felt sure the girl could take care of herself under ordinary misfortune, and he knew that Naomi was entirely dependable, a crack shot, and a veteran on the snowfields. That he would overtake them he had no doubt whatever.

It was the fact that he was not at his post, that he was not fulfilling his orders to the letter, which bothered him the most, and also, he disliked putting the dogs to the further strain of another night and day without rest.

He did not consider a direct effort to cut off at right angles to the other trail, as there was a possibility, of course, that unlooked-for circumstances might prevent Naomi from keeping to the course which she had planned, in which case the finding of her trail would be greatly complicated. Although he considered it unnecessary to retrace to the fork of the two trails, he headed for a point southwest, rather than directly south. This should bring him a day's mush from the fork on the other trail, and would give Barbara's team an advance of from thirty to forty miles.

Another disturbing feature of the situation was the shortage of ammunition. Eleven shots are few indeed when the time to be spent on a trail may extend into months, and the circumstances calling for the use of them are more than likely to be many. There is a limit to the amount of provisions which may be carried on a long mush, and the traveler on the snowfields and in the mountains must depend upon his gun to replenish his store. The dogs must have meat, and in the present case they must have extra portions to keep them in condition and spirit for the unusual strain under which they were put, and at any rate the supply would soon be exhausted.

Blake must have food that he could eat, and Lisle had completely abandoned the idea that the tenderfoot might eventually learn to relish the canned and dried stores which were the only kind that might be taken on a journey such as this.

That they might meet with someone who would be willing to share his ammunition with them, was extremely unlikely. Men carry not an ounce more than they need, on a mush. To share it would be a sacrifice, and one seldom indulged in by the half-breeds or Indians, of the type generally met with in this region.

Blake realized this difficulty, if not so keenly as Lisle, at least sufficiently to cause him to resolve to force down the food which was so distasteful to him. He assumed a sudden fondness for beans, which he figured would be the most substantial nourishment of the provisions which they carried, and of which he would not be required to eat so much in order to convince Lisle that he had eaten a meal. He "drowned" them as much as possible in strong coffee, which was the one thing Lisle cooked that Blake really enjoyed.

This deception worked for several days until a fit of nausea, which he was powerless to hide from

Lisle, compelled Blake to admit that he just could not eat beans. Accordingly, against Blake's earnest attempts at dissuasion, Lisle shot two more rabbits and kept his eyes open continually in search of tracks of larger game which might be packed and carried along with them. Lisle was obliged to regret that he had not shot the caribou which had been so available on the cliff.

It was a strenuous few days and nights which followed the discovery of the mistake in their pursuit. They made no attempt at camping, except for a few hours at a time in which to eat. The dogs demanded a certain amount of rest or Lisle would have taken none himself. Blake slept on the mush and kept vigil during the rests, while Lisle snatched a few moments of sleep.

They traveled due southwest for a day and a night before they came to the tracks of the team they sought. Instead of keeping a straight course, the trail seemed to be circling toward the south and east, and Lisle wondered why Naomi had chosen this roundabout way toward her goal. The possibility that the Indian woman may have been endeavoring to avoid contact with the maker of the trail which they had mistakenly followed, occurred to Lisle.

Owing to the confusion of the tracks it had been impossible to determine which team had passed first, or if they had met, as both trails were comparatively fresh. Lisle knew that Naomi would take every precaution to avoid any meeting with the usual type of man on the winter mush, except that no effort would be withheld to determine if any trail which they should encounter might lead to the object of their search.

Silver, of course, would be the medium for the settling of any such doubt. But Silver's tracks were missing on either trail, a fact which puzzled Lisle considerably. If the dog had gone on a hunt to follow the trail of some wild creature, his tracks would be easily discernible. If there had been a mishap to any of the sled dogs, and Silver had been put into the traces to fill the vacancy, the husky would have to be accounted for.

At noon of the second day along the rediscovered trail, an ominous lowering of the clouds and a dead calm which was evident even in the vast open plain over which they mushed, gave evidence of the approach of more snow. This fact, insignificant enough to Blake, the tenderfoot, was filled with forebodings for Lisle.

He knew that a comparatively light fall could obliterate all trace of the trail on which it was so urgent that they keep, and also that it would necessitate the use of snowshoes, which fortunately he had not been compelled to wear heretofore.

Also, he was beginning to be worried about Blake. The man could not eat, and coffee alone is a poor fare for building strength in an exhausted body, and supplying the warmth which it would be necessary to have stored within during the cold spell which was almost certain to follow a storm.

Accordingly Lisle summoned all his reserve energy — the little that remained after the constant strain under which he had been laboring. He urged the dogs onward in clear coaxing tones, treating them with pats and strokes and extra fish on the short rests, but with anguish in his heart that it was necessary to make them undergo the strain which was now nothing short of cruelty. They knew that they were again on the scent of those other dogs which this master who was so kind, but who ever urged them beyond their strength, wished to overtake. That they had left the dog scent for awhile was vaguely puzzling to the animals, but it was not given to them to reason, and their instinct told them

that they were still struggling toward that for which their master was searching.

Half wolf, mostly, and more than half savage, these beasts had also in their veins the blood of the dog, and the dog may ever be tamed by the hand of kindness. And once tamed, that great element of faithfulness which is the heritage of all dogs, responds to the death. Lisle had made a wise decision indeed when he had chosen to drive the team himself.

They made better time on the afternoon mush owing to Lisle's continuous efforts, and it was not until four o'clock that the first flakes of snow from the approaching storm began to fall. It was one of those quiet beginnings which to those experienced in the manner of storms in the North country heralded a long extended fall. It did not burst in great roars and whirls and bombard the snow in drifts about the hills and rocks where the country stood at bay, and finally seemed to spend itself by reason of its very energy. It came silently, a steady filter of grey-white mist, steadily growing thicker and falling faster, its evenness seeming to express its capacity for endurance.

When night came, Lisle declared his determination

to continue on without stopping either for food or rest. To stop the dogs now would mean a possibility amounting almost to a certainty that they would refuse to go on again, and the sighting of Barbara's campfire light, he felt reasonably sure, was now a matter of but a few hours' steady travel. The leader of the dogs, a powerful Labrador husky, had already stumbled and gone down several times, and the affect on the others was evident. The weakening of their leader was breaking their courage, and Lisle's redoubled efforts to urge them on were rapidly becoming less effective.

By midnight there was a foot of freshly fallen snow and the tracks which Lisle followed were rapidly becoming obliterated. There was only the irregular hump at the sides and in the center of the tracks to guide him, and these were discerned dimly enough through the darkness and the veil of snow. Lisle was finally obliged to rely entirely upon his sense of direction as applied to the circling route which the tracks of the pursued had taken. They had rounded slowly toward the northeast and Lisle concluded that Naomi had indeed been endeavoring to avoid contact with the maker of the tracks they had crossed, and was now circling back.

It was three o'clock when Lisle sighted the twinkle of a light far ahead. Summoning his last ounce of endurance he urged the dogs on toward the faint yellow speck, knowing that he was nearer to it than on the former clear night when he had sighted it, as the snow had caused it to be undiscernible from a greater distance.

It was exactly ten minutes later that Kazak, the leader of the huskies, dropped in his traces and refused to move. It would have been futile to put another dog in his place. Their leader down, the other dogs "struck," and after floundering uncertainly for a moment in the soft snow, they relaxed utterly, nor would all the kindness nor all the meat nor all the whip lashes in the world, had Lisle been inclined to use the latter, induce them to move on.

But the light of the campfire glowed ahead like a tiny beacon through the white mist over the sea of snow, and Lisle made no effort to arouse the dogs. He prepared, rather, to make camp on the spot, and after kindling a blaze, which he hoped Naomi would see, he warmed some soup for Blake and himself, and then dropped exhausted into his blankets, telling Blake to be sure to call him if he slept later than dawn.

"I was awake quite a bit, last night," said Blake when he had aroused Lisle the following morning, "and I noticed that the light ahead went out rather suddenly about an hour after you turned in."

Lisle peered ahead, trying to pierce the white dotted veil which was still hanging about them. The dogs, which had not moved from where they had fallen, had been half buried under the snow.

"There may be several reasons for that," Lisle replied. "Silver or some of the sled dogs may have accidentally pushed it out with the snow, or a gust of wind may have deadened it if it were low enough."

"It was quite bright," said Blake, "and there was no wind. That's why I noticed the thing particularly."

Lisle considered a moment.

"I can't see anything," he said finally. "Guess the sooner we move along the better. I'm not taking any chances on losing them again."

Lisle had been too much engrossed in the urgency of his getting ahead during the last few days to give more than passing attention to Blake. But now, in the cold grey light of the snow-filled dawn, he was suddenly appalled at the man's appearance. The

flesh of the tenderfoot's face was white in spite of its recent exposure, and seemed fairly to cling to the bones beneath, and his eyes seemed to have sunk deeper into their blue circled sockets. The expression,—the one which had caused Mrs. Carey to call Blake "beautiful" and which had convinced Lisle of the quality of the man at their first meeting—seemed to be the only thing which remained of his normal individuality.

"Good God, man!" Lisle exclaimed, "we've got to find something you can eat. I've been neglecting you."

Blake smiled wanly.

"You've had enough on your hands—and mind," he replied, "without me. I'm all right. All I do is sit—so I don't need much."

"All you *will* do is sit," replied the other, "if you don't soon have something to make you strong enough to stand. We'll have more time to forage from now on. Are you warm enough?"

"Yes," replied Blake, "I ought to be, with all your furs on me as well as mine."

"Cheer up," said Lisle, "the weather hasn't begun to be cold yet, and by the time it hits thirty below we'll have your inward heat supply re-

enforced so you won't need more than your own."

Lisle spoke with considerably more assurance than he felt. The game which would have served them was buried under the snow in windfalls, or dens or burrows, or under the deep mounds and drifts, where it would remain until the storm passed, or would die, if the storm continued long enough. It seemed that the chances for Blake's improvement lay in the endurance of the snowfall.

The storm continued throughout the day. Lisle had been obliged to resort to snowshoes some time before and consequently they moved comparatively slowly. He knew, however, that Naomi would have to do the same.

It occurred to him to wonder a little why Naomi had not missed seeing his light behind her, and accordingly slackened her pace in view of the possibility of his having been unavoidably detained, either at Ft. Wrigley or somewhere during the journey. He rather wished he had thought of arranging some signal by which he might have attracted her attention in case of the latter event.

They mushed until four o'clock before Lisle became disturbed at not sighting the dark moving speck ahead which would have been Barbara's team.

Surely Naomi was driving at top speed, and he was at a loss to determine the reason.

Along towards six o'clock the storm gave evidence of slackening. It was entirely dark, but there was yet no sign of the light ahead. There was, however, the faintest trace of tracks on the white carpet which became constantly more visible as the snow-fall became less intense. Undoubtedly they were still on the trail.

Lisle watched for the light, intending to continue on until he should sight it, and then make camp for the night. When eight o'clock came, and there was no sign of it, he became decidedly uneasy. There was a possibility that Barbara and Naomi had made their camp in a shelter which would serve to hide the light from him, but it seemed unlikely, owing to the extreme barrenness of this part of the country. Besides, Lisle figured that Naomi would surely realize the difficulties under which he followed their trail during the storm, and accordingly would be liable to make her fire where he could see it.

It was about two hours later when Lisle, now thoroughly mystified and alarmed, halted his dogs, and with a sudden feeling of apprehension ran forward to investigate more closely the tracks of the

trail they followed. The result of his investigation corroborated all too clearly the fear which had gripped his heart — which seemed now to stand still as though threatening never to beat again. For the trail which they had been following ended abruptly within five feet of Kazak, the leader of the dogs, and the maker of the tracks had retraced them! It was obviously and unmistakably an attempt — and under cover of the darkness a successful one — to throw any pursuing team off the trail!

That Naomi would deliberately attempt to mislead him, Lisle knew was out of the question. There was only one solution to the unexpected turn events had taken. He had been mistaken in his deductions at the finding of the broken pipe bowl. Either Naomi had recently acquired the habit so prevalent among the older squaws, or she and Barbara had somehow come into possession of the pipe and had thrown it away on the remains of their fire. At any rate there was no question but that he was following the wrong trail.

That it was futile to attempt to overtake them now, was apparent. Even if Naomi should discover that Lisle was not behind them and should delay,

there would be little chance of finding their trail again, which for at least forty miles would be totally obliterated by the snow. There was but one thing to do, and that was to take the shortest cut to the Bay and trust that they would eventually find trace of those they sought. They would go to Fort Churchill where they would enquire if the two women had been seen, and would stock up with more provisions and ammunition.

To say that both Lisle and Blake were appalled at the enormity of their error, and the consequences it involved, is to put it mildly. Each considered himself entirely to blame, and secretly swore to undergo any hardship which would serve to help shorten the time required to reach the east.

Lisle would have mushed on without food or rest except that he felt the dogs could not again be put to the strain under which they had been, without disastrous results. Blake determined to eat beans at any cost, so that he might gain strength enough to go part way on foot, thereby lightening the load.

It was well indeed that he succeeded this time better than before, for the cold spell which Lisle had anticipated followed immediately after the storm.

Lisle refused to take the fur coat from Blake, knowing that to deprive the man of it now might be fatal to him in his weakened condition. The exercise of running beside the sleds was still almost sufficient to keep Lisle warm, and he stopped frequently to make hot coffee. He kept a sharp lookout for the tracks of game which would now come out from the cover of the snow and go abroad in search of food.

At first the only tracks he discovered were those of lynxes, broad and rounded, now and then showing where a series of leaps had been made. They usually led from thicket to thicket, where hares, grouse, or other small game might occur. Once, as they were rounding the base of a high cliff, they witnessed, far above, the killing of a mountain sheep by one of the long-legged, short-bodied cats. The lynx sprang from a ledge upon the sheep as it passed beneath, and thus taking its victim by surprise, soon reduced it to helplessness.

They came, again, to the erratic, meandering tracks of a fox, sometimes running parallel with their trail for many miles, giving evidence of the animal's industrious stalking of some one of the many items of its bill of fare.

"Kenai fox, I think," said Lisle, after examining

the tracks and remarking upon their large size. "Its ancestors must have wandered clear in from Alaska. I wish he'd chase a nice fat hare in our direction."

Whether Lisle's desire materialized literally or not is a matter for speculation. Nevertheless it was scarcely twenty minutes after he had expressed it that the third of their precious shots found its way into the vitals of one of the little white creatures.

"Another little furry soul gone on," remarked Lisle, making an attempt at the conversation which seemed so difficult owing to the weight which lay upon their spirits.

"He's given his life in a good cause, however, and here's hoping he'll be properly rewarded."

Blake ate the stew Lisle made from the hare with the relish of one near starvation. And when on the following day Lisle shot what he had been hoping to for so long, a caribou, which would last until they should reach Fort Churchill, he felt that a large part of the load which had been on his mind had been lifted.

After three more days and nights, during which the weather, though quite cold, was hardly so intense as Lisle had anticipated, Blake was able to relinquish

to Lisle his fur coat, and to take his first run alongside the sleds. And as he was adept at the handling of snowshoes, they were able to make considerably better time than heretofore.

And so for a week and a half, Lisle and Blake, the tenderfoot, with Kazak and his followers running once more with ears and tails erect, mashed on over the hard crust toward the east.

And then, one night as they camped in the open under a sky filled with icy stars and a crescent moon, something which sang a song of hot steel and freezing air as it came, whizzed out of the grey space and into the breast of John Lisle. Uttering a low wheezing gasp he started up, tottered, and fell forward on his face.

Somewhere far to the northward, in the middle of a snowfield which appeared to stretch on into illimitable space on every side, an Indian woman lay stretched between her blankets beside a fire which was kept burning almost constantly, feigning illness.

Tending her solicitously, with never a murmur of impatience at the delay in the pursuit of her quest, was a lovely girl, whose wide eyes somehow reminded the squaw of the shadows which the slender

fur-clad figure cast upon the white carpet on which they camped.

On a blanket at the opposite side of the fire lay a great silver-black dog who kept his steady eyes ever upon the figure of the girl, and one of whose forelegs lay stiff and bandaged beneath his long shaggy head.

Occasionally, when the girl's back was turned to her, the Indian woman would raise herself on her elbow and peer back in the direction from which led the tracks of their sleds.

And strangely enough, when the woman appeared to be sleeping, the girl would stand for long moments with her face turned toward the west, her shadowed eyes ever searching for a tiny moving speck in the daytime, or the glimmer of a light at night.

She smiled as she turned to where the squaw lay in her stolid pretense, for the girl knew that it was the excuse for a delay until their protector should once more appear at his post.

As the days went by and there was still no sign of him, the girl began to fear for what might have happened. And serving not in the least to lessen her anxiety was the disturbing memory of their second

meeting, somewhere back on the trail, with that spectacular murderer with the eyes of a child, Lord Harold, of County Surrey.

The Indian woman's thoughts were also beginning to be filled with apprehension, and they, too, were centered around the outlaw, but they were concerned with an entirely different possibility — the memory of the broken bowl of a pipe which, with keen precision, she had shot from between the lips which had smiled and mocked at her, as for the second time she had warned their owner away. And it was with keen remorse that she now realized the possible results of her seemingly inconsequential act of throwing away the object which she had at first intended keeping for a reason known only to herself.

And so while Lisle lay with a bullet in his breast fully sixty miles to the southeast of them, Barbara and Naomi camped on the snowfields, waiting for the light of his fire to appear on the western horizon!

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The bullet which came out of the darkness passed through Lisle's breast just below his right shoulder. For two days it was a question indeed as to whether or not he had reached the end of his last trail. On the second day it seemed that the Siren of the North who had lured him there was at last showing her true colors — for when the man's life might easily have been spared under normal conditions, she let loose upon him and the thin white-faced man who tended him, her white dogs of the north,— grim, bitter cold — and another storm.

And this storm did not come as had the one before it, steady, even, enduring — but it came with a roar which seemed to have in it all the menace and malice of ten million savage throats calling for the life's blood of these two human atoms who had dared to trespass so far into their domain. It crashed against the tiny silk tent of the wayfarers like the lash of a giant whip. It lifted the edges of their shelter and drove its missiles of white shot

beneath it. There was nothing in all the North country that was sacred from the vending of its fury, and it later went down into the history of the land as the most terrible storm in fifty years.

Men on their traplines, unable to reach the shelter of their tents or shacks, perished and were buried in a cold white grave, and the country was a veritable cemetery of the creatures of the wild. It was difficult to imagine, in the face of this terrible white monarchy, that a multi-colored democratic summer had ever been sovereign over the land, or would ever reign again.

It was only the dogged perseverance of Blake, the tenderfoot, that pulled Lisle past the point of death and compelled him to struggle for further existence in a world which now seemed like a hell to him — a frozen white hell,— and more bitterly cold perhaps than any other man lying at death's door had ever survived. To Lisle, who felt that he had so utterly and so terribly failed in the greatest "commission" of his life, there seemed little indeed worth the struggle which Blake was ever urging him to make. There was practically no hope whatever that he would be able to help Barbara now. He did not think that she would perish in the storm.

She had seemed too superbly alive for that, too well equipped with those forces of resistance with which Nature has endowed us all, but which in some have been weakened and impoverished. She would not perish. But her quest would lead her where there were a hundred and one reasons why she might need him. Aside from this, to be near her, to protect her, was his sworn duty as well as his utmost desire, and the fact that he had failed so completely was like a poisoned arrow in his heart.

But Danny Blake had not given up hope. Tenderfoot though he was, and by no means a well man, he nevertheless was not in the depression of spirit which accompanied the condition caused by Lisle's wound, though his heart was heavy with the firm conviction that he alone had been the cause of their predicament.

Blake knew, as Lisle did not, that Barbara did not love him, and therefore it was not for any hope of reward that he kept up the courage which was the only thing which pulled them both through. It was enough for Blake that he loved Barbara and that she needed the protection of Lisle.

Also, Blake was not so certain as Lisle that Barbara would successfully weather the storm. It was

not given to him to measure the physical fitness of things. He thought of her only as a beautiful, tender thing, bred and reared in the sunshine of life, surrounded always by the comforts and ease of her civilization — a fragile flower, as far removed from the hardy wild things that were fashioned to withstand the onslaught of the elements as could be imagined. And somewhere out there in that illimitable swirl of white piling shot was this flower, surely bending, if not breaking altogether beneath its fury!

Blake knew that he could never fill Lisle's place as her protector — that he could not handle the dogs or find the trail — or having found her, meet the emergencies which that protector might be called upon to meet and which were so foreign to him. There was only one thing that he was fit to do — and that was to utilize every atom of his strength to *make Lisle live!*

He did not know just why he had followed Barbara to the North country, and further, on the trail of her quest. It was not because he expected her to change her mind in regard to him. He knew her well enough to recognize the finality of that last letter. Also he was learning the significance of her

reference to the "tang." He knew that there were men who loved this life which spelled nothing but privation and discomfort and loneliness to him. And it was one of these men — a man such as the one who lay wounded on the bunk — that Barbara would love.

He had come to the North in obedience to some overwhelming compulsion which he had seemed powerless to resist. Even Barbara's admonition "do not try to find me," had not been sufficient to swerve him from what he knew to be an utterly hopeless course. He did not know that he would even give notice of his presence should he get near enough to her to do so. To be of help to her had not occurred to him. He was too much of a tenderfoot to be that in this land of snows. To be near her — to know that only a few, rather than a few thousand miles lay between him and the only thing in the world for which he cared, seemed to be his sole object or excuse for the course he had chosen.

But now it seemed that after all there was a reason more worthy than this why he had come. He knew that Lisle would have perished where he lay in the snow with the bullet in his breast if he had been alone. Barbara needed Lisle. And now there

was a chance, slim though it seemed in the face of the raging white terror about them, that he would live. And Danny Blake must be the one to pull him through!

Lisle lived — and it *was* Danny Blake who pulled him through. With a never tiring vigil, with the tenderness of a woman, the tenacity of a man who has centered every atom of his spirit and soul upon the attainment of one object, he fought the merciless white fingers of death until he won. He did not win gloriously, suddenly, but slowly, and so painstakingly that it seemed to drain the very dregs of his being to do it. Not only was it necessary for him to nurse Lisle through the crisis of the three days and three nights of the storm, but it was necessary for him to keep him from slipping back again through the terrible cold spell which followed. For a week after the last crash of wind and the last avalanche of snow the mercury clung to seventy below at night and rose only ten degrees in the day time. There was no sign or sound of life of any kind. Across the dead and buried land came now and again the distant pistol shot snaps of the trees in the forests far to the south, which were the only

things standing sufficiently upright to mark the end of one buried swamp, or open barren, or charred burn, and the beginning of another. The animals which had buried themselves beneath the snow would never push their way up through the iron crust, or if they did, would perish soon after from the intense cold and lack of food. Only those which had found their way to dens, or caves, or closely tangled windfalls, would venture out again and these not until hunger drove them. Even the cry of the wolf pack, which they had heard several times before the storm, was missing.

Ever cheerful, untiring, his tall slim figure seeming to grow smaller each day, and his fine sensitive face bearing scarcely a resemblance to its former likeness, Danny Blake continued to minister to his wounded comrade. His wistful eyes seemed to grow larger and deeper and they shone with almost an unearthly light. On his chin and lip was a dark stubble growth of hair. Blake had been too much occupied with his duties to bother about himself. In fact he scarcely thought about himself at all. It was for this reason, perhaps, that he was able to go through what two weeks before both he and Lisle would have considered impossible.

At the end of the week of terrific cold the mercury rose to forty. Lisle rallied, and Blake got a little of the rest which he so sorely needed. But as though with the lessening of the tension under which he had been something snapped within him, he woke Lisle one morning with the uncanny mutterings and the strange jargon of one ill with a raging fever.

Lisle dragged himself painfully to where the unconscious man lay, and for the first time, as he looked into the thin fever-seared face, he realized what Blake had done for him.

"And I called him a *tenderfoot!*!" groaned Lisle.

For two days Blake tossed and moaned on his blankets — and often to his lips came the name of Barbara. Lisle cared for him as best he could, but his own pain and weakness were still so great that his efforts were woefully slow and inefficient. At first he could not feed the dogs, he could not get fuel for the fire after the supply which Blake had laid up in one corner of the tent was gone. But after two days of intense suffering from the cold, and impelled doubly by the increasing unrest of the famished huskies, Lisle made one supreme effort

and dragged himself through the snow to where the rest of the grubsacks and the fuel lay buried.

When Blake came back to consciousness his first thought was for Lisle.

"Good God!" he groaned, realizing in a sudden rush what had happened, "you can't—I must—"

"Lie still," said Lisle, "you're worse off than I am. Don't try to get up. You'll gain time in the end if you don't. We'll have to stick it out the best we can—together."

"Listen to that," Lisle said a few nights later, "the night raiders are on the trail of food. That's the first sound I've heard since the storm, and horrible as it is, it sounds almost good to me."

It was the deep-throated hunting cry of the wolf pack—a hungry pack by now, and with little chance of finding food. Blake shivered. There was nothing companionable in the sound for him. It was but one more voice of this merciless white wilderness—one more battle cry of the myriad invincible forces that were pitted against the life of man. As the sound grew nearer he could feel the pores of his skin rise in a wave of dread—the instinctive recognition of an age-old enemy.

There was a stir among the sledge-dogs as the cry came steadily nearer. They pricked up their ears and listened intently, some whined, and all huddled more closely together. But there was no trail in the snow with the man scent upon it, the wolves were running down wind, and there was no campfire light to attract them. Therefore they passed within two hundred yards of the tent without discovering it, and finally swung south, and the sound of their hunting cry died slowly away.

The wolf-pack did not find food that night — nor the next — nor for many another. There was a reason for this. It was the same reason which kept Lisle and Blake from attempting to move on in spite of their condition, and which, sixty miles to the northeast, delayed Lord Harold in accomplishing his third and carefully planned meeting with the beautiful white girl and the Indian woman. The reason was another storm.

As Lisle had thought, Barbara did not perish in the storm, nor did it do more than cause her the discomfort of the intense cold which could not altogether be eliminated from the small easily heated tent. Her outfit had been more carefully provided

by Lisle than it would have been for a veteran of the snows.

It was the dread which lay in her heart concerning Lisle which caused the look that Naomi saw in the girl's eyes and which made the Indian woman wonder.

Something must indeed have happened to Lisle. They had waited for him now for three weeks. Dread pictures passed through Barbara's mind — pictures of this man lying somewhere in the snow — alone — wounded perhaps — for she knew that to the outlaws of the North country one red coat is as worthy a target as another. And the storm. Where was he through that? Once she almost decided to tell Naomi that she knew why they had been waiting — and that she wanted to go back to see if they could find him. After all, the search for Steve might as well lead one way as another. But Barbara knew that Naomi was also worried, and that although the Indian woman had not that other thing in her heart for him, nevertheless she would choose the wisest course in regard to him, and there might be any number of reasons known to this veteran of the snows why they should not go back.

Barbara was not sufficiently schooled in the

methods of the North country to have given the incident of the discarded pipe-bowl any significance. In fact it is doubtful if she noticed that Naomi had either kept it or thrown it away. The only solution to Lisle's absence, to her, was that he was in danger, or worse, had met a lonely death on the snowfields.

If she had but half realized before that she loved him, there was no doubt in her mind whatever, now. When he had been near her, and safe, the answer to this question might have been postponed in the face of the more important matter of her quest. But now as she waited day after day here on the limitless snowfield and yet he did not come, she knew that she loved him as she had believed she would some day love some man — some man who had in his blood this thing which she called the "tang." And it was with a terrified grip at her heart that she realized that this very "tang" which had first lured him to this land, might already have exacted its toll of him, as it had of so many others.

Barbara's reliance on the judgment of Naomi was well placed. The Indian woman was fairly convinced by now that Lisle had been misled by the pipe-bowl and had taken the trail of Lord Harold which had crossed their own, and she therefore finally

determined that nothing could be gained by waiting further for him on the snowfields. What might have happened on the trail of the outlaw, she could only imagine — but at any rate, to go on to the east, in which direction Lisle knew they were bound, seemed the only wise course. He was certain to discover his mistake sooner or later, she thought, and would be unlikely, on account of the storm, to make an attempt to find their trail again. Rather, he would doubtless continue on, possibly to Ft. Churchill.

Accordingly, upon the cessation of the storm, Naomi appeared to have a most remarkable recovery from her lingering illness, camp was broken, and they moved on once more into the dazzling east.

The wound which Silver had suffered from the gun of Lord Harold, was now healed sufficiently for him to limp alongside the sleds. When they had encountered the outlaw for the second time, Silver had leaped snarling and snapping at the end of the thong which tied him to the gee-bar of Barbara's sledge, where she had been compelled to put him on account of his ever increasing enmity toward the huskies. The dog's first lunge had been when the outlaw was still over a hundred yards distant.

He was coming down wind, and as his scent reached Silver the dog seemed suddenly to go wild. The third lunge of the silver-black body wrenched the thong from the gee-bar, and the life of the outlaw was saved only by the shot which wounded the dog's leg and delayed his second attack until Barbara had grasped his collar.

"You got my coat, the last time," the outlaw had said, "but you'll get nothing more while I can hold a gun!"

For the remainder of the journey until they made camp on their wait for Lisle, Barbara tucked Silver in beside her in the sledge, or permitted him the whole of it when she traveled on foot.

The enmity between Silver and the leader of the sledge dogs, called Boz, a powerful Alaskan husky three-quarter strain wild, was becoming so pronounced as to cause the two women to keep continual watch that the two might not get near enough to fight. Silver was tied inside the tent at night and Barbara kept him always by her side when they made camp for the noon-day meal.

It was on the first day of the somewhat milder storm which followed the one which had broken the fifty-year record of the Northland, that the first real

trouble came. They had stopped for the noon meal, and Naomi had gone forward to bring in the grub sacks. Barbara left Silver's side for a moment to examine one of her snowshoes which had seemed loose during the morning mush. On her way back with the grub sacks, the Indian woman stopped to feed the huskies, as was her practice. Silver was quick to see his advantage. He stole forth to where Boz the leader was rapidly devouring a piece of meat, and with one long leap and a snap of his powerful jaws, he snatched the meat from the very mouth of the husky. In the twinkling of an eye the Alaskan dog was upon him, and the fight which Silver had deliberately invited was begun. Each with the slashing, sabre-like stroke of the north dog they fought. Barbara and Naomi called to Silver in vain. For once he was beyond the recall of the voice of his mistress. With a cry of horror the girl saw the long black body of the Mackenzie hound go down beneath that of the Alaskan — the struggle of the under dog grow slower and more feeble as the fangs of his opponent plunged deeper into the silver throat. They missed the jugular vein by the tiniest fraction of an inch, but the other dogs did not know this. Their enemy was down. He had ceased

kicking and the fangs of their leader were buried in his throat. It was time for them to close in and help finish the fight. With fangs clicking and their low eager whines turned to savage growls and snarls they hurled into the mêlée.

It was Naomi who saved the life of Silver. But to do it she was obliged to shoot five of the dogs, including Boz. The other three she managed to club away from the victim. Seeing their leader lying in the snow, killed instantly from Naomi's fire, they finally ran from before the raining blows of the club.

Barbara had never before witnessed a sight so terrible, and she was white and trembling as she knelt over the bleeding and unconscious Silver. Naomi bathed the dog's wounds and bandaged his leg again, which was probably the cause of the other dog's gaining the advantage. Ordinarily he would hardly have been a match for the Mackenzie hound.

With four of their team dogs gone and Silver unfit for service in the traces, Barbara traveled on foot altogether. They moved much more slowly than heretofore. The snow fell steadily and sharp gusts of wind blew it across their faces, blinding them. Several times the Indian woman would have

made camp, but Barbara insisted upon going on.

The storm lasted two days and then the sun once more turned the world about them into a blaze of crystal darts. They labored on for a week more over the dazzling iron sheet. Often, toward the end of it, Barbara would brush her hand across her eyes as though to sweep away a film which seemed to come over them. She had seen Naomi do this, too, and there was a strange red cast to the Indian woman's eyes. And though she told the girl nothing of snow-blindness, Naomi made her bathe her eyes often in strong tea, an Indian remedy, and she herself did likewise.

Silver recovered quickly from his wounds under tender care, and was soon able again to limp beside the sleds. He was still unable to be harnessed with the other dogs, but it was necessary to lighten the load as much as possible.

And then one afternoon Naomi stopped suddenly and halted the dogs. With the only cry of emotion that Barbara had ever heard from the stolid lips the woman brushed her hand across her eyes and then turned slowly to the girl. The red film was over them — thicker and more terrible. Naomi was snow-blind !

It was with a sinking heart that Barbara realized just what this meant, not only to the Indian woman herself, but to their quest. Naomi was the guide, and a blind guide is useless. Besides, Barbara had felt the dreaded film upon her own eyes growing thicker each day.

In vain Naomi bathed with the tea. She was no longer young and the eyes which had so often withstood the merciless glare of the sun on the snow had lost some of their powers of resistance.

The fact that Naomi could no longer guide the dogs was not to be doubted. Barbara would be compelled to drive. Naomi refused to sit in the sledge, but tied her right arm to Barbara's left with a long leather thong. And so with the Indian woman towed behind her and Silver at the head of the dogs, the girl whom Danny Blake thought too fragile to weather the elements of the Northland, drove the team of four huskies across the snow toward her goal.

But though blind, Naomi was not altogether useless.

"Keep into path of sun," she told Barbara, "east, always."

But as though in deliberate challenge, a great bank

of clouds came up out of the north and covered the sun — a bank so dense that the days seemed like continual twilight — and for four days there was no east or west, but just one endless expanse of grey-white snow which met the clouds on every side.

When Naomi, realizing that many a veteran of the snowfields has traveled around in circles without the guidance of the sun, would have made camp until the cloud bank disappeared, Barbara insisted upon continuing. Even to go in circles somehow seemed better than waiting again. Also, there was a new fear in her heart — a fear that made her almost wish that the sun would not come out again.

Naomi had been right. Before the noon of the second day of the disappearance of their beacon, they had circled slowly to their right, and Silver's long nose was pointing straight into the south.

On the fourth day the cloud bank rolled away without any fall of snow and again the world was dazzling white. Almost frantically Barbara urged the dogs on as the film across her eyes grew thicker. She could hardly see Silver at all and the other dogs were but a blurred, uneven line of dark against a glaring background. When they made camp at noon, it was with groping, uncertain movements that

the girl prepared the meal and fed the hungry huskies. Naomi hoped it was inexperience which caused this slowness.

As they moved on again in the afternoon, Barbara's lips moved often in the silent prayer that by some miracle she might be spared from this thing which was coming upon her. She stopped twice during the afternoon and bathed her eyes with the tea.

There had been some further trouble also with the dogs. Nursing an ever increasing hatred for Silver, the three huskies resented his having been put in the lead. The dog behind him kept snapping at his heels, and Silver would return the snaps with a flash of his fangs aimed at the husky's shoulder. It was with difficulty that Barbara kept the dogs apart when they were unharnessed.

They were unusually troublesome this afternoon. Twice, now, Silver had halted almost completely in his efforts to reach his enemy. Each time it was Barbara's voice which prevented a catastrophe.

Along about three o'clock something else attracted the dogs' attention. They were running down wind, and the animals had caught a scent. It came from directly ahead of them, and it was the

scent of man and dogs. The huskies sniffed the air excitedly and increased their speed. Then suddenly, and without any warning, Silver stopped dead still, his fangs bared, a low growl in his throat. The three huskies, unable to stop in time, piled forward upon him and one of the sleds swung wide to the left and overturned. In an instant there was a turmoil of snarling, slashing dogs, a splitting and ripping of wood, and rending of leather thong. It was impossible for them to do much harm to one another so long as the traces, though severed somewhat, held them bound. Naomi stumbled forward brandishing the club and Barbara called commandingly to Silver. And just then the thing which had attracted the dogs came dimly into her darkened vision, a small dark blot, growing rapidly larger as it came on. And as she strained her eyes in an effort to see through the veil which hung across them, something seemed suddenly to snap and the veil grew black. The thing had happened! Barbara could not see!

What occurred after that seemed to Barbara like a strange and terrible nightmare — like a melodrama enacted on a darkened stage. Out of the midst of her sudden darkness came the sound of a man's voice

yelling at the snarling dogs, the report of two pistol shots, the dull rain of heavy blows from a club, and shrieks of savage pain. With a low moan she realized her utter helplessness as she recognized the voice of Lord Harold.

"O God," she breathed, "why, oh, *why?*"

With a sudden hope in her heart she reached for her gun. Naomi had done the same, and having judged their aim well, the outlaw found himself looking into two gleaming steel barrels.

"You are not welcome, here," said the girl, keeping her eyes lowered that he might not see the red film upon them.

"So I observe," came the voice of Lord Harold, "in fact so I have observed before. Nevertheless it occurs to me that I may be of some service to you. Your dogs have made a mess of your harness, and your squaw is blind. If you will — *damn that dog!*"

The last words were uttered in a very different tone, and there was a loud commotion among the dogs. Evidently the outlaw had jumped from in range of the guns, obviously being more afraid of the snarling beast who was vainly endeavoring to reach him. Barbara called to Silver and turned

quickly, trying to keep the outlaw covered. In that moment her ruse was discovered, for as she turned Lord Harold saw the red film.

"You too!" he exclaimed with a deep intake of breath.

Almost subconsciously Barbara raised the gun and fired three times.

"You might as well save your ammunition. You haven't a chance of hitting anything," came the voice of Lord Harold, "and if you'll kindly calm that wolf before I'm forced to plant a bullet in his vitals I'll see what I can do with your harness."

With a pathetic little gasp of helplessness Barbara sank down upon the snow and called to Silver. Her mind was working quickly. She must find some way to rid herself of this man and that at once. She dared not refuse to call Silver for fear the outlaw would shoot him, as she was certain he would be only too glad to do, and something told her the dog was more valuable to her now than ever. It dawned upon her slowly and with horror that there was only one way to accomplish this.

She would wait her advantage. He would speak — he would kneel to mend the harness. With a

sinking at her heart and a prayer on her lips that she might only wound and not kill, she rose and started to feel her way cautiously forward. But she could not see the overturned sled and before she had advanced three steps her snowshoe struck the first of the fallen grubsacks and she fell forward across it.

"Guess I'd better take that little toy away from you," said a calm voice at her side as a hand gripped her arm and assisted her to her feet. "You're getting rough with it. I'm surprised at you rather, a nice refined girl acting like a bold bad bandit. Will you pass it to me, or shall I take it?"

With an exclamation of disgust Barbara threw the gun into the snow. She did not want the man to touch her again.

"Neither, eh?" said Lord Harold as he stooped and picked it up. "Game to the last inch! Beauty surpassed only by spunk. I consider myself fortunate indeed to have — er — made your acquaintance. And now, my squaw," to Naomi, "we'll have yours, and then we'll begin our little jaunt — together."

Naomi did not throw her gun into the snow, and the outlaw was obliged to dodge three remarkably well aimed shots before he succeeded in securing it.

"Business is rushing," he remarked as he wrenched it from her hand. "And it's liable to be more so, with all the noise we've been making. Consequently, the sooner we move the better. The ladies will ride.

"Take hold of your beast," he added to Barbara, "and I warn you to *keep* hold of him, while I harness the others."

Barbara crept forward to where Silver still snarled and strained to reach the throat of the man he hated. She wound her fingers in the long hair of his neck and fumblingly removed his traces.

The outlaw unharnessed the other three dogs and put them in with his own team, attaching Barbara's sledges to the rear. Then he came over and took her by the arm. The grasp was not rough but Barbara realized the futility of resisting it.

"It's five-thirty," said the outlaw. "We must start at once."

Barbara rose to her feet, weakly. The last hope of a miracle was gone. She was absolutely helpless — with this murderer, in this white wilderness — blind and alone except for a squaw who was also blind, and a dog which she dared not loose.

And just as the thought crossed her mind, the

nearness of the man he hated gave to Silver some supreme energy, and with a writhing motion accompanied with a sudden lunge he freed himself from the girl's detaining grasp. With one long leap he had cleared the space which lay between him and the outlaw.

With the suddenness of a cat the man turned and met the onrush of the huge animal with the crouching attitude of a football player ready for a tackle. His head caught the dog squarely in the stomach and bowled him over his shoulder, and the iron jaws snapped in the air as the silver-black body fell crashing into the snow. Quick as a flash, before the animal could spring again, Lord Harold had whipped out his gun and shot four times. Three of the shots were clean hits and with a shriek and a snarl of pain the Mackenzie hound threw backward, writhed and lay still.

With a cry Barbara groped her way to where the dog lay. Something new and terrible was surging up within her. It was burning her like a consuming fire. Lisle would have understood it, but Danny the tenderfoot would have stood appalled at the very thought of such a thing in the girl that he loved.

"Your dog," Lord Harold's voice was saying, "is dead. I warned you."

There was no fear in Barbara's heart as she heard the words. There was just a burning white rage — a rage of which she would never have believed herself capable. She clenched her small hands until the nails dug into the soft flesh. If she only had a gun! If she could only see!

Lord Harold was speaking again. He had seen a small dark speck on the southern horizon — and it was growing larger.

"Hurry!" he said as he again took Barbara by the arm. "We must go at once!"

Barbara snatched her arm away.

"Naomi may go if she wishes," she cried, her voice half choked with anger, "but I — am going to — stay right here!"

The outlaw laughed shortly.

"Here with a dead dog — and nothing else!" he said. "That would be a death befitting so plucky a heroine, but one which unfortunately I refuse to permit. You're far too pretty to die. I am sorry to be rough, but you will have to hurry."

Barbara did not move. With one sweep of his

arms the outlaw caught her up and bundled her into the rear sled. Here he strapped her securely with an improvised leather thong. Two minutes later he had the kicking, biting Naomi also imprisoned, and with a crack of the long whip and a low cry to the dogs, the team lunged ahead full speed into the north.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Lisle was the first of the two men to recover sufficiently to do the things which had suffered so much neglect during the time they had both lain ill. He moved slowly, and the least jar to the wounded shoulder caused him the most intense pain. Nevertheless he would have attempted to move on if Blake had been able even to ride through the two days' storm. The man was now little more than a skeleton and a racking cough had taken possession of him. The fever had diminished, but he was still far too weak to be moved. There was no game to be found, and he could not eat.

Immediately upon the cessation of the storm, however, Lisle harnessed the dogs with his left hand, which was a feat in itself, and somehow accomplished the breaking of camp and the loading of Blake into the rear sledge. Then began a journey which to the impatient Lisle seemed like the crawling of a snail. He had the utmost difficulty in restraining the dogs after their long vacation, and to

walk ahead and break trail was the only method by which he could keep them down to a pace which he could endure. For each forward and outward thrust of the long narrow snowshoes was accompanied with a sharp twinge of pain which grew swiftly into a steady throbbing ache. His legs were unsteady and his breath came hard. It was impossible to make more than eight miles a day.

But even eight miles was just that much nearer the place where he hoped to find news of Barbara and some medical attention for Blake.

After the storm there came again the hunting cry of the wolf pack. It was a deeper-throated cry than before, and wilder. If they had been hungry then, they were famished now. Occasionally, there would be another cry which would rise above the concentrated cry of the pack — a cry more blood curdling, and having within it that note which carries fear to the heart of even the bravest of men — the cry of the wolf gone mad.

Danny Blake heard this cry as he lay in the creeping sledge or by the side of the fire at night. And ever to his heart came the one thought — the dread that Barbara was hearing it too. Perhaps it was nearer to her than it was to him. He groaned as

he thought of the things he had read concerning the hungry wolf packs of the North — and of the mad wolves which know no fear. The pack would only attack man as a last resort, Lisle had said — when there was no other food to be had. For they were afraid of the flash of a gun and the light of a campfire. But he had also said that the storm had taken an enormous toll of the creatures upon which these animals prey, and indeed, the men had not seen a single track so far.

Only once the cry of the pack had been less insistant for awhile, and the men had come upon the remains of the carcass of a moose, only the bones and torn pieces of hide and scattered blots of blood remaining of the slaughter and the feast. Blake shut his eyes and a shudder ran through him at the sight. Barbara in danger from those beasts! Barbara, the cultured flower of civilization — and this!

Lisle did not share Blake's fears for Barbara. He knew that he had supplied her well at Ft. Wrigley with fuel and ammunition and that with these she was safe from the wolves, and had no doubt reached Ft. Churchill by now and had stacked up again. Somehow he could not think that harm in any form had come to her.

Nevertheless through the weary, painful days, he trudged ahead of the team in the direction which he believed her to be, that he might perhaps, in spite of his failure, through the mercy of Divine Providence, some day take his place again as her protector.

And as he went the hunger of the wolf pack rang once more through their cry as they found no moose or other game — and it was not long before they had discovered in the wind a new scent — the scent of man and dogs — and had found the fresh trail in the snow.

As Barbara sat strapped in the sled of Lord Harold her brain was working rapidly. Where was the outlaw taking her? There was a subdued note in his insistent call to the dogs that puzzled her. Why was he afraid to call loudly as he had done when he had first arrived on the scene and had quieted the hubbub of the dogs? Was it just his natural caution caused by the thing he was doing, in spite of their apparent isolation in the vast snow-field? Every now and then she could tell by the sound of his voice that he had turned his head as he called. In fact he had done it often, and once there-

after he had cracked the long caribou-gut whip with sudden renewed energy and had urged the dogs on to even further effort—and they were already straining so that their breathing came like the rasping of dull saws. The sledges lurched from side to side as they followed in the wake of the increased speed. Slowly the idea that they might be followed grew upon the girl. Perhaps by some miracle, the three shots which she had fired, or Naomi's, both with the same vague hope that they might be heard by ears to which they would carry the message of their peril, had indeed been heard. With a wild hope in her heart she thought of a locket which hung about her neck. If she could only reach it! Then, even if there was some one behind them just travelling a route of his own which might lead away from their trail at any moment, perhaps the finding of the locket, if she could only drop it behind her, and the rifled body of Silver, would serve somehow to attract the curiosity at least, of the driver of the other team. That that driver might be the coarsest half-breed or the wildest Indian, or even another and equally as desperate an outlaw, did not occur to her. And if it had it would hardly have been sufficient to dissuade her from her purpose, if she

could but accomplish it. Almost any one would be better than Lord Harold, and it was her only chance.

But the outlaw had taken careful precaution that she should not be able to reach the knots in the thongs which strapped her in, and he had wound the caribou-gut bands tightly around her wrists. After working several minutes she gave up all hope of ever getting them up as far as her throat. Then suddenly another idea struck her and with a little gasp of joy she reached to see if she could touch the left pocket of her coat. She could just reach the top of it. With much maneuvering, which she endeavored to make appear like an effort to get more comfortable, she managed to work the coat around her body further to the left. Finally her hand found the inside of the pocket and the object for which she sought. With a prayer on her lips that the outlaw might not see her action, she drew out a small leather card-case and threw it over the side of the sled.

The thing from which Lord Harold was fleeing was a dog-team and two men, the one a white man and the other, the driver, an Indian. A florid face with small eyes set too close together, a round, generous nose, and a thick, slightly protruding underlip

were the most distinguishing features framed by the white man's fur hood. He mushed behind the rear sledge on the long narrow snowshoes typical of the country and he handled them like a veteran. He was peering ahead to a place where a dark speck had just disappeared.

"Mush faster, Smoke," he called to the Indian, "they're gaining." Then, as his eye was attracted by something else, "they've left something behind. Hurry!"

The Cree cracked the whip and the end of it stung the lead-dog. The men on snowshoes had difficulty in keeping up. They were almost running.

"If he wasn't in so damned much of a — hurry," puffed the white man, "I wouldn't be so — curious."

Suddenly the Indian uttered an exclamation as he peered ahead.

"Look like man lef' behin'," he said in Cree. "It black — an' big."

They traveled on a few hundred yards further, then the Indian spoke again, but with less concern.

"It is dog," he said. "Bad, mebbe."

They stopped when they came to the silver-black

body of the dog. The white man looked at him with interest.

"*Some* beast!" he said, "I've seen him somewhere — before."

"Bad!" said the Cree, gathering up the whip-end and preparing to move on. "That why they shoot 'im. Wolf blood. Lot's of it!"

The white man drew off one of his mittens, knelt beside the dog, and wetting the end of his finger, held it in front of one of the black nostrils.

"He's still alive," he said. "The bullets only punctured his ribs and shoulder. Damn good lookin' beast. Have half a mind to take 'im."

"Bad!" repeated the Cree again, "an' better dead!"

The man hesitated, but finally deciding that the Indian was probably right, gave the word to move on.

Suddenly the sledges flew past a small dark object which lay in the snow on the left side of the trail. The Indian kicked it with his snowshoe apparently without noticing it, but the white man stooped and picked it up. It was a leather cardcase, and as the man turned it over a name engraved upon

it in letters of gold shone from the rough black surface. The man stopped as though suddenly turned to stone, his florid face turned a ghastly white with the pallor of shock or fear and an oath sprang to his lips, but only a hiss came through. The Cree had stopped the dogs and came running back.

"You are sick!" cried the Indian. "The boss is sick!"

The man stared at him as though he had not heard. Like one in a trance his voice came thickly, scarcely above a whisper.

"*We've got to get that team!*" he said. "If we don't — *you die!*"

It was a week after the wolf pack had found the trail of Lisle and his team, that the first of the silent grey shadows with the gleaming eyes came near enough to the firelight to be plainly seen. During that week they had slunk along behind the team in the daytime just near enough to keep it in sight, and at night they passed to and fro beyond the circle of the firelight like dim wraiths, only the glow of their eyes distinguishing them from the ghosts of wolves, rather than the flesh and blood creatures. And in-

deed it looked as though there was little enough of that, judging from this one which now came so near.

There was a reason for this unusual boldness. To-day there had come to the pack, along with the scent of man and dogs, the strong flavor of fresh blood — of the blood of a fresh kill. For Lisle had shot a caribou and a rabbit and had thereby robbed them of the only prey which had passed that way since the second storm.

To the famished pack the smell of the meat was madness — and the red which had glowed for two days now in the eyes of their leader had suddenly become to look like that in the eyes of one of the members of the pack which they had recently eaten. This member had gone mad and had bitten one of the others before that one had downed him — and they had both died — the one from the bite, and the other from the fangs of the pack which had closed in even before the victim had uttered the death cry.

Danny Blake had heard that cry — and the cries of the pack as it rended the flesh of the two former members — and he made no pretense to hide the fear that it brought to him.

“Ugh!” he shuddered, “it is terrible! They are

terrible! If they'd only quit following us! When I'm awake I see them — and when I'm asleep I dream of them!"

Lisle smiled rather sadly. The cries of the wolf pack did not strike terror to his heart. Somehow they were just another, if slightly more gruesome, part of it all. It even occurred to him that the country would not be just that country without them — that it needed that cry — if not the death cry, at least the hunting cry of the pack — to complete it. He knew the futility of attempting to explain this attitude to Blake. For in spite of his own lack of fear, he could appreciate and sympathize with the feelings of this man who, in spite of his splendid courage, was still a tenderfoot — would always be a tenderfoot.

"They aren't exactly agreeable companions," Lisle said. "I wish I might leave them the buck to stall them off awhile until they strike the trail of other game, as I'm afraid we're going to disappoint them. But we need the buck to put life into you — and I've only five shots left."

"Other game!" repeated Blake, "or another trail! Heaven forbid it should be hers! Let 'em follow. So long as they stay outside that fire I'll

try to forget them. Have you any idea how far we are from Churchill?"

"No," replied Lisle, "I'm afraid I haven't. We can't have kept a straight course because of the two storms having so completely obliterated any landmarks, and we've had some cloudy days. If we were among the mountains I might be able to tell. But you needn't worry about the wolves. They'll never dare come beyond the fire."

"And in the daytime?" asked Blake.

"I've a block that will serve for a club — if they venture too near, and one killed means a feast for at least *some* of them, and less danger for us."

The assurance in Lisle's voice once more quieted Blake's fears, and he would have slept that night, had it not been for the boldness of the red-eyed leader of the pack.

"I don't like the appearance of our scrawny-ribbed friend-enemy," said Lisle, attempting to throw a jocular light on the situation which held so much discomfort for the tenderfoot. "Think we'll bunk outside to-night. He might get curious on the farther side of the tent — and we aren't driven to build our fire *around* us — yet."

The animals had ceased circling about just out-

side the circle of light as though searching for some avenue of attack that was not lit by the little flames of which they were so much in fear. They had seated themselves and were watching Lisle as he prepared the blankets. The dogs were plainly disturbed by the nearness of the leader. They huddled up close to the fire, and together, and occasionally low grumbling snarls would come from among them as the red-eyed watcher moved or changed his place. Presently the pack grew closer behind their leader. The fact that nothing happened to him, and that the strong smell of the fresh kill was in their nostrils drew them on.

"Good God!" exclaimed Blake. "Do I have to try to sleep with that bunch of wild-eyed ghosts staring at me? I'm for the tent. At least they can't see us there!"

"All right," said Lisle, "you sleep in the tent and I'll stay here. I'd rather bunk out, anyway — and I've slept with them looking at me before. They won't bother you while they can see me."

Blake went inside and Lisle curled up on his blankets. The dogs were so restless they would not permit him to sleep. Along towards midnight the red-eyed leader of the pack advanced two more feet

nearer the fire. As he did so, two of the dogs started up, and the others immediately followed. With their eyes on the pack they backed up, whining and shoveling the snow behind them. Lisle jumped to his feet as they pushed the snow across the fire and put it out.

It was all that the wolf pack needed. The flames which they feared were gone, and before them, cowering and afraid, were nine dogs with the sweet flesh upon them and the life's blood flowing through their veins which the pack craved. With a rush and a shrieking from wild throats, terrified howls from the huskies, a crashing and snapping of fangs, and the tearing and rending of flesh and bone, the fight was on. And above all the other sounds rose the terrible "mad" cry of the red-eyed leader.

Lisle sprang for the red-hot brands which remained of his fire and hurled them into the midst of the turmoil. But the animals were far beyond the fear of the fire now. There were but seven of the wolves, but they were savage and famished, and the well-fed dogs, though a match for them physically, had not that fierce power born of long starvation. Those of the dogs that did not fall victim to the fangs of the pack died from the bite of the mad

leader, or ran shrieking off into the night. And when Lisle's fire-brands were gone, it was a sorry sight which met his eyes.

Only two of the wolves had been killed in the fight — and one of these was the mad leader. The others fell upon the torn bodies of the dogs and the two of their own kind, and there was a crunching of flesh and bone and a loud clicking of savage fangs which turned Lisle sick, veteran though he was. And as he turned to get more fuel with which to rebuild the fire, he saw Danny Blake, ashen-faced and trembling, leaning against the tent pole.

Lisle rebuilt the fire quickly. Neither man spoke. There was not much to be said. The real calamity of what had befallen them in those few terrible moments, was only too apparent. Their dogs were gone. They did not know how far they were from Ft. Churchill, and they had already traveled over three hundred miles without having met another team.

Blake was the first to break the silence after they had sat some time before the newly built fire, Blake with his back turned to the spectacle of the gorging wolves and trying vainly not to hear them. About them rose the sickening smell of fresh blood, and

the tenderfoot drew in closer to the smoke of the fire.

"Lisle," he said slowly, and there was a strange break in his voice, "if there's anything I can do — any sacrifice I can make — that would help — I'm going to do it. If it hadn't been for me —"

Lisle looked up quickly as he caught the other's meaning. There was no mistaking the sincerity in the dark-circled eyes. With a sudden surge of feeling the young officer turned his eyes away that Blake might not see their mistiness.

There was no doubt in Lisle's mind but that Blake meant what he said — that he would make *any sacrifice*. This tenderfoot who cried out against the loneliness of the great grey spaces — who paled at the sight of blood and cringed before the eyes of the wolves, would sacrifice his life in a manner from which even a strong man would shudder and draw back — and he would die as gamely as ever a strong man died! Something rose in Lisle's throat and choked him, as he wondered at the strength of some men called weak!

"We're not beaten — yet!" was all he said.

Blake shook his head sadly.

"I know," he said, "I've been thinking about it.

You'll insist that we go on together. You know I can hardly walk, let alone pull a sledge. So you'll take two — and as much as they'll carry. And you'll load the one with caribou meat — for me. If you'd go alone you could pack all you need on one sled — and you'd make double time."

" You're game!" said Lisle, looking across the firelight, " dead game — gamer than I ever believed a real dyed-in-the-wool fenderfoot could be! And perhaps it's for that reason as well as any other that what you suggest would be the last thing I'd do. I admit it's going to be some pull — and you'll have to mush — and you're not fit to stand. But we'll pull — *together!*"

Blake sighed wearily.

" I knew you wouldn't do it," he said, " so I suppose that settles it. You're boss of this outfit. But the time may come when you'll have to — and I may be conscious — and I may not. But if I'm not, I want you to remember what I've said. She needs you — and she doesn't need me. But there's one thing on which I refuse to give in. We *won't* take the caribou."

Lisle considered a moment.

" We'll take some of it," he said finally. " The

fish sack will not be needed now that the dogs are gone, and we'll have to leave the tent. It isn't much use any longer with those fellows around, anyway. We'll just have to pray for good weather, and that we're nearer the Fort than I dare to hope. We must take all our fuel. That is about the most important thing, aside from the provisions."

In the following dawn the men resumed their travel. Lisle pulled the two sleds packed with fuel and provisions. It was a hard pull, even though the runners slipped smoothly over the hard crust — for his wound was by no means healed. But even then, Blake was always a little behind him. The snow-shoes seemed to the tenderfoot to weigh at least a hundred pounds each.

The five remaining members of the wolf pack followed closely in the rear now, making no pretense at hiding in the daytime. Their one victory had served to make them bolder, and they had not yet been warned away by the sharp spit of fire from a gun. They seemed to sense that these men were fighting a losing fight.

On the third day of their new mode of travel Blake stumbled and fell twice, and Lisle was obliged to help him rise again. But the tenderfoot smiled

through blanched lips and refused to stop. They made hardly the eight miles a day now.

That night Blake lay on his blankets before the fire utterly exhausted. Beyond him the five wolves sat, very close to the fire circle now. The feast of the huskies had long ago ceased to appease their hunger, and there was again that intense watchful glare of anticipation in their eyes. Whenever Lisle leaned over with his back to them they would get up and come a little nearer, and when he would straighten up suddenly and turn toward them, they would spring back and settle down again.

"Guess I'll sleep with one eye open," said Lisle to himself.

It was along about midnight that something made Lisle sit up suddenly and peer blinkingly into the darkness. As he did so a grey form sprang back from within three feet of him, and a faint clicking of fangs came to his ears.

"You grey devil!" he exclaimed. "It wouldn't take much, now would it!"

He noticed then that the fire was very low. He went for more fuel, and as he stooped to load his arm something came slinking slowly up behind him. He straightened, and the thing jumped back, but

two eyes still gleamed at him out of the darkness not more than a yard away.

For the first time a shiver ran along Lisle's spine. They *were* getting bold.

"Guess I'll move the fuel nearer the fire," he thought, shoving the bag along before him with his foot. "Won't dare go out of the fire circle at night if this keeps up."

He rebuilt the blaze and settled himself again. As he did so the grey forms crept up and took their positions just outside the circle. Lisle could plainly hear the clicking of their fangs, as though they sensed that the moving of the gunny sack of fuel had been one more sign of his weakening.

He closed his eyes, intending to keep awake. But even the close proximity of the staring beasts could not keep away the sleep of which his tired body was so much in need.

It was just as he began to doze off that Danny Blake, turning fitfully in his exhausted, troubled slumber, rolled out of the circle of the firelight.

On the instant the wolf pack rose and stretched eagerly forward, while their new leader crouched for a spring. And it was the hand of God indeed that awakened Lisle just in time to catch the spring-

ing body in midair with a burning firebrand. The brand caught the wolf on the head and sent him hurling to one side with a howl of pain. Lisle flung another into the pack.

"We'll have to sleep in relays after this," Lisle said. "We've just five shots — and we can't use them — yet."

Accordingly, the next night the one man watched while the other slept, and often it was necessary to cower the wolves with the firebrands.

The next day Blake munched with teeth set and his thin hands clenched to keep up the fight which was steadily becoming too much for him. He stumbled more often and as often as five times he fell. He kept on until the white world suddenly became black to him and he slumped forward and lay still. So silently had he fallen that Lisle had gone several yards farther before he missed him.

Lisle made camp on the site. And that night the wolves, with that strange uncanny sense that a new point had been won in their favor, drew so close that Lisle was obliged to waste five of the now precious firebrands to keep them back.

The next morning Blake made a valiant attempt to move on. He put on his snowshoes in spite of

Lisle's insistence that they rest for at least half a day. And indeed they were obliged to take this half day's rest, but on the other end — the afternoon.

"There's only one thing to do," Lisle said. "That's dump some of the canned stuff and pack you onto the sled."

"And you pull me, when you can hardly pull them as they are now!" said Blake. "No, there's something else. You take half of the provisions and fuel and leave me the other half — and I'll stay here until I'm fit to move on. Then I'll follow in your tracks."

Lisle shook his head.

"It might storm," he replied, "and the tracks would be obliterated. You'd never be able to find your way alone. Besides, there isn't enough fuel to divide. To tell you the truth, it's nearly gone — and what's worse we'll have to build our fire around us — very soon. And you can imagine how much fuel that will require."

"Someone is bound to pass by sooner or later," insisted Blake. "I could go with them — or they could direct me in case of the storm of which you speak."

"That's far too long a chance to take," replied

Lisle. "You might be here for months without sighting anyone. Besides, there are those," waving his hand in the direction of the wolf-pack.

"We'll wait together," he continued. "You'll be able to start along again in a day at the most. We may strike a cabin somewhere, although they're scarce in the open places. I wish I knew how far we are from some wood patches. There ought to be some soon, if we're anywhere near Churchill."

As he spoke a sound came to the ears of both men. It was far away — but there was no mistaking it. It was the muffled report of three pistol shots!

With a cry Lisle sprang up and peered in the direction of the north, from whence they had seemed to come. With every muscle strained the two men waited for the shots to be repeated — but no sound came.

"Her signal!" cried Blake. "You must go — at once!"

"It may be someone else — a trapper shooting game, perhaps. If it is hers it will surely come again! Listen!"

For five minutes the two men did not move. Then Lisle turned.

"I'll investigate," he said, "but I'm sure there would have been a repetition of the shots if it were her signal. She and Naomi both know it and—Good God!"

The shots had come again.

Lisle sprang for his snowshoes. Blake took his gun from his holster and held it out.

"You may need this!" he said.

Lisle groaned. "And so may you!" he said. "Heaven help me, I don't know what to do. I may not come back—and you'll need those shots!"

"You'll come back," said Blake with an assurance he did not feel, "and if you don't, I'll get along somehow. Besides, there's no question about what you should do. Remember—it's for *her!*!"

Lisle made no effort to conceal the emotion in his voice as he gripped the hand of the tenderfoot.

"Blake," he said, "you're the gamest man I ever knew! And if it takes the last breath from my body I'll come back! And be sure to *build your fire around you to-night!*"

And so Lisle went forward once more along the trail which led to Barbara. There was no doubt but what it was hers when he had come upon the bleeding body of Silver. With a heart gripped with

fear he saw the tracks of the three teams in the snow — hers, and the outlaw's, and the white man's, with the Indian driver. He saw that two teams had gone as one from the place where Silver lay — and he prayed that the one which followed in its tracks might be that of a friend.

Behind him Danny Blake, the tenderfoot, sat alone in the midst of the great snowfield. As the night came on he built his fire around him. And the wolf pack sat just outside the circle of the light, a new, eager hope in their eyes.

## CHAPTER NINE

On into the night Lord Harold urged the dogs ahead at top speed. He rode standing on the rung of Barbara's sled and the girl was obliged to lean forward against the thongs which bound her in order that her head might not lean against him. His commands to the huskies were given in sharp but subdued tones, and many times he would turn and peer back through the darkness and immediately crack the long whip across the back of the lead dog. For the team which followed them was lighter — and it was gaining. Twice the outlaw cursed the Indian woman beneath his breath. If he could but leave her. But she could talk!

Barbara was now sure that they were being followed. She hardly dared hope that their pursuer might be Lisle, even though it seemed almost that whoever it was had come in answer to the three shots.

It was about midnight that Lord Harold stopped

suddenly, and in great haste thrust a gag of a piece of gunny sack into the mouth of the Indian woman and unfastened the thongs which bound her. Barbara could hear the struggle as the woman became aware of what the outlaw was about to do, but the girl could not determine the cause of the commotion. A dull thud came to her ears as some heavy object dropped on to the snow, and there was something about the silence which followed the sound that sent a chill of apprehension through the girl. As they moved on again her fears were verified, for she could feel that the load was considerably lighter.

" You have left Naomi! "

" I have," replied the outlaw laconically.

" Some one is — following us? "

" They are. Someone has been following me for three years. It will be fully that many more before they catch up with me."

" Your confidence appears to me to exceed your caution," said Barbara. " Naomi cannot see — but she can talk! "

The outlaw laughed shortly.

" To-morrow, perhaps," he said, " but not to-day. And in the meantime I have shifted about one hun-

dred and thirty pounds from my team to my purser's."

Barbara shuddered. The man was certainly confident.

In a few moments the outlaw laughed again.

"They pause for their bundle of weight!" he chuckled. "On! you lagging devils—I beg your pardon. One gets so unused to the presence of ladies in this country!"

"And of *gentlemen!*"

"Bravo! Still spitting, I see. The hot-houses certainly do produce some surprising varieties. I compliment you! Many a hardy snow-blossom would have drooped in body and spirit long before now!"

Barbara ignored the appraisal.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"To Hope Castle," replied the outlaw.

"Hope Castle, indeed! And then?"

"A priest — one Corriveau — as worthy a sire as ever forsook his chaplet for a gun. The real article, ordained, and qualified to perform the ceremony. He may not look it, but he is. I give you my word."

"Your word!" scoffed the girl, "a priest! — and a ceremony! Indeed, you are very funny!"

"It does seem rather strange, doesn't it — having one all ready? He's been there for about eight years, though, quite possibly having been preserved for me by Providence for this very occasion. He's pretty old. Considering what my friend the squaw has no doubt told you, it seems to me you should be quite relieved to know of the priest. You see you are of my own kind — a gentlewoman — I was born to respect them. And added to that is your superb courage — and in this country one learns to respect that almost more than anything else."

"Indeed!" cried the girl angrily, "you are most flattering! I regret that such worthy motives should be so doomed to disappointment!"

As she spoke the outlaw uttered an exclamation and slashed the long whip forward, leaning so far that the girl's head was hard pressed against his shoulder. But he seemed not to notice it. Coming steadily on through the darkness, their pursuers were gaining on them again.

For thirty minutes longer the dogs strained every

nerve and muscle in response to the repeated lashing of the whip. The man's breath came hard and Barbara could feel her heart beating wildly with the excitement of the chase. And then suddenly one of the dogs went down. The others were checked and whirled about. The sleds plunged forward into the confusion and came to a stop with a sickening jerk.

With an oath Lord Harold sprang forward and straightened the sleds, cutting the fallen dog from the traces. With a savage kick he sent the exhausted animal hurtling into the snow, and crashed the whip across the others as he sprang back into his place. Barbara had difficulty in evading his elbow as the whip lashed in frenzied swiftness.

Scarcely ten minutes and Barbara became distinctly aware of sounds from behind them. Between the cracks from the outlaw's whip came the faint crash of another — and the muffled cry of a driver. The outlaw whipped out his gun and fired. There was no answering shot. As she crouched low behind the back of the sledge the girl's heart almost ceased beating. She strained her ears for the sound of the other whiplash, and it was with a little sob of relief that she heard it. They were

still coming on! They were still gaining! They had not replied to the shot because they knew of *her*! Perhaps after all Naomi had not been unconscious — or perhaps it was indeed Lisle who followed them!

Lord Harold fired again. For five minutes at least there was no sound from behind them. Then, just as a wave of fear again swept over Barbara, she heard the muffled whiplash.

The outlaw was now bending forward so far that almost half of his weight was against the girl's head. Her neck ached cruelly from the continued effort of straining against the thongs. With every muscle tense and hardened she drew as low as she could, raising her tightly bound feet against the dash of the sled. And as the outlaw's body followed the lessening of the resistance of her head, she gathered every atom of her strength and suddenly lurched up against him. Her head caught him directly in the stomach, and with the unexpectedness of the impact he lost his foothold and was hurled backwards into the snow.

For two hundred yards the dogs ran ahead, and then, missing the sting of the cruel lash, they slackened their pace. Barbara called to them, wildly

urging them on — but the drive of the whip and a man's voice were the only masters they knew. The lead dog faltered and dropped. As the others followed suit the sledges swung out and stopped with a jerk. Barbara heard the sound of shots again and the crunch of the outlaw's feet on the hard crust as he ran towards the sleds. There was another shot — this time from their pursuer — and the hot bullet hissed into the snow beside Barbara's sled. The outlaw replied to the shot with a volley of four. Then, just as he was two yards from the rear sled there came another from the rear. The outlaw stopped dead still, standing for a long instant with his hands half raised and his head thrust forward. Then without making any sound, he fell.

As Lord Harold dropped on to the snow the pursuing team dashed up alongside and stopped. Barbara could hear the heavy breathing of the dogs and the crunch of snowshoes as someone came towards her. She wanted to cry out — to ask who her deliverer was — but her voice seemed to have left her. The man spoke first — and when she

heard his deep guttural tone a great wave of disappointment passed over her. It was not Lisle.

"Who's there?" asked the man.

For a moment the girl did not reply. Instinctively she wished she could disguise her voice that he might mistake her for a man.

"A traveler," she said finally, knowing that the ruse would be useless.

"A woman!" exclaimed the voice as the newcomer came up to the side of the sled.

"I am Gaston Cordez—a trapper. I was running on my trap-line with my Indian. It leads in this direction. When we come to the squaw, gagged an' unconscious, I suspects all ain't as it should be—an' so I follows. Who fired the shots?"

Barbara felt that the man was lying. She was certain that he had been pursuing them before he had found Naomi. Also he spoke without the slightest suggestion of the accent which would be expected to accompany his name, and there was something decidedly unpleasant about his speech and manner. Nevertheless, she thought it could do no harm to tell him who the outlaw was.

"It is Lord Harold, a notorious outlaw," she re-

plied. "Naomi and I had an accident with our dogs and this man happened along and mended our harness, and then proceeded to run away with us. Is Naomi all right?"

"Lord Harold!" exclaimed the man, springing to where the outlaw lay. He turned him over, opened his coat, fumbled in an inside pocket for a match, and struck it on the box.

"By God!" he exclaimed as he peered into the face of the unconscious man, "what luck!"

"You might bind him up with these thongs he so carefully prepared for me," suggested Barbara.

The man came forward and cut the thongs. Once free the girl endeavored to rise and then sank back with a groan. Her muscles ached cruelly and her head felt dizzy.

"Where is Naomi?" she asked again. The tension upon which she had been keeping up was now rapidly slipping away from her.

"She's with Smoke, my Indian," replied Cordez, "they'll be here pretty quick. I divided the team so's to catch you."

As he spoke there came a sound from the rear.

"Smoke's comin'," he said. "Don't you want to exercise some?"

There was no answer. The man went over to where the girl lay in the sled, limp and exhausted, her head dropped forward.

"All in," he said as he lifted her out and placed her on the snow, her head resting against his knee.

As the team with the Indian drew up he gave a few short orders in Cree, and before long the Indian had a fire built and was brewing tea. Barbara lay on a blanket beside the fire in a deep sleep, and near her, still unconscious, lay Naomi.

Fifteen miles to the rear of them, a lone man trudged forward on snowshoes. His breath came in sharp gasps and now and then he would catch at his shoulder and bend almost double with pain.

"God give me strength!" he muttered through blanched lips, "God give me *strength — strength!*"

Morning found Barbara rested and Naomi restored to consciousness. The blindness of the two women was of course apparent at once by the daylight.

"You've got to have 'em bound up," said Cordez, "an' we got to find some place where you can stay out o' the sun. There's a cabin some-

wheres off there to the east. Smoke,"— and the rest was addressed to the Indian, in Cree.

Smoke replied after a moment's pause, and they began breaking camp.

Barbara and Naomi occupied the two center sleds and Lord Harold was strapped in the rear one. Cordez mushed behind while Smoke broke trail.

At noon they stopped in a clearing and it was here that Lord Harold regained consciousness for the first time. When his eyes rested on Cordez he started violently and would have cried out, but Cordez sprang forward and thrust his hand over the outlaw's mouth, and ordered the Indian to gag him. The afternoon mush was made in silence as had been the one of the morning. At dusk they sighted a small isolated clump of firs and Smoke called something back to Cordez, who lashed the dogs.

Presently they came to a cabin, entirely concealed by the trees, which apparently had long been abandoned. It required twenty minutes to clear away the drifts of hard packed snow from in front of the door.

In half an hour the two rooms were made comfortable and reasonably clean. Cordez insisted that

Barbara and Naomi stay in the one which had evidently been the bedroom, which he darkened by means of hanging their coats across the two tiny windows.

"A couple o' days an' you'll be all O.K.," he assured Barbara. "Then we'll start for the Bay. It ain't more'n sixty or seventy mile now."

"An' before we go," he added to himself, "you're goin' to tell me all you know about one Herbert Roth!"

It was about midnight that Barbara was awakened by a slight sound. Someone was moving about, seemingly along the wall toward the door to the next room, where Cordez and Smoke slept before the fire, and Lord Harold sat strapped in a chair.

The girl was about to call to Naomi, when the door creaked slightly and a faint gleam from the dying fire in the outer room fell across the floor.

Barbara sat up in bed. She could not see the streak of light, but she was sure the door had been opened. The sound of someone breathing heavily came to her ears.

"Naomi!" she whispered.

The door was pushed hastily shut. There was a pause, and the woman answered.

"Yes — Mees."

"Is that you moving about?"

"Yes — Mees."

"What are you doing?"

"I guess — mebbe — walk in sleep," replied the woman.

"Go back," commanded the girl, sinking down among the bedclothes once more. "It is strange," she thought, "she has never walked before."

The girl fell asleep again in ten minutes. At dawn she was awakened by the sound of excited voices in the next room. It was Cordez and the Indian, talking together in Cree. Slowly Barbara became aware that the voice of Cordez was angry and that the Indian was apparently endeavoring to defend himself. Then Cordez uttered an oath in English, there was the sound of some object being overturned, and then the repeated thud of blows on flesh. Something dropped to the floor.

Barbara threw off the covers and felt her way quickly to the door and listened. The sound of blows had stopped, but she could hear hoarse breathing and Cordez' voice muttering angrily to himself.

She could not catch the words. She reached for one of the coats, slipped it on and opened the door.

"What is the matter?" she demanded as Cordez wheeled.

"Damn lot the matter!" growled the man.  
"Outlaw's been loosed!"

The girl caught her breath.

"You mean he's — *gone?*"

"That's what I mean. An' that devil on the floor is the one what done it!"

Barbara shrank back in the doorway.

"Oh!" she faltered, "are you sure? — I mean — what have you done to him?"

"Nothin' compared to what I'd like to do to 'im! But unfortunately I got to spare some of 'im to go after the damned murderer!"

Barbara backed into the room and shut the door.

"Get up, you devil!" came Cordez' voice, "take the dogs an' follow 'im. An' if you come back without 'im you'll need all th' evil spirits o' yer damned tribe to save *yuh!*"

There followed a succession of shuffling, dragging sounds which indicated to Barbara that the Indian had somehow managed to drag himself across the floor and out of the door. In a few moments

the door was opened again and she heard Smoke's voice, excited and full of fear. There followed a loud shout of rage from Cordez, and then the banging of the door again.

Barbara went out into the other room and crossed to the outside door and opened it. Cordez was shouting epithets at Smoke in high strung rage, and presently there came the sound of the lashing of a whip and cries of pain and imploring. Barbara felt her way down the steps and toward the confusion.

"Stop!" she called.

The sound of the whiplash ceased as Cordez turned.

"Go back!" he snarled. "This is a man's business, not a woman's!"

"And where is the *man*?" cried Barbara, "I hear no one but a *beast*! If you haven't heart enough, perhaps you have brains enough to realize you are destroying the only means of catching the outlaw again! Besides, how do you know Smoke cut him loose? Did you see him?"

"No. But who else could o' done it? Unless," and the man's voice changed, "unless it was —"

"It wasn't!" snapped the girl, "and you needn't suggest it! Nevertheless you have no proof that

Smoke did it, and until you have you'll kindly cease this brutality!"

"Looka here, Miss," said Cordez, "you don't know how serious this here business is. The Mounted has been chasin' that slick devil fer over three years now an' there ain't none of 'em come anywhere near 'im so far. An' there we had 'im all tied up an' safe, an' someone lets 'im go! An' not only that but he's taken all our dogs an' we ain't got a chance o' catchin' 'im again. An' if my Indian didn't set 'im loose, what I want 'o know is, *who did?*"

"I don't know," said Barbara shortly, "but at any rate it is done, and it won't do any good to beat Smoke for it. Let the Mounted track him down. It is their business."

"It's the business of any Canadian citizen to track 'im down—and," he added suggestively, "havin' done so, to see that whoever offends the Law by freein' 'im is properly punished!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's an offense punishable by law to free a criminal—an' that there's only three people here what could o' done it an' one o' them three is me, an' I was asleep. You're right about savin'

the Indian to go after 'im. He'll go on snowshoes an' he'll not come back until he finds 'im — an' that ain't liable to be for some time! An' in the meantime I'm goin' to find out who did the settin' loose!"

"And then?"

"I'm goin' to prosecute 'em!"

The girl was thinking quickly. The memory of Naomi feeling her way towards the door in the night persisted in recurring to her. Could Naomi have done it? And if so, why? Surely she had suffered enough at the hands of the outlaw. Why should she wish him to escape his rightful punishment? That Smoke had really done it seemed unlikely. And yet it was surely one of these two. And now the Indian would go on the outlaw's trail and Cordez would probably succeed in placing the blame upon her or Naomi. Why he should do so she could not imagine, but that that was his intention was obvious from what he had said.

"Why should you do that?" she insisted, "you, a trapper, many miles from civilization. Surely you must have some other reason aside from your desire to assist in the execution of the law."

"Listen!" said Cordez, leaning forward and catching the girl's arm, "I've got a reason all right.

But if you'll tell me somethin' I want to know, there won't be no prosecution. I want you to tell me what you know of the owner of a cardcase I found beside your trail when I was followin' his lordship's team!"

Barbara drew back from the man. She was surprised at his request, but not in the least alarmed. After all, why should she not tell him what she knew of Herbert Roth? Perhaps he could in turn furnish her with some clue to the things which were puzzling her.

"I cannot imagine why you should be interested," she said slowly, "but I will gladly tell you all I know. Perhaps you will then be able to enlighten me. I found the cardcase beside my campfire on the evening of our seventh day out from Dawson — on the banks of a lake. I don't know why I kept it, except that I once knew of a man by the name of Herbert Roth, which, as you know, is the one engraved upon it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cordez, "and this man — did you ever see him?"

"I once saw his picture — in the newspapers. He was convicted of grand larceny and my brother was the lawyer for the prosecution. The case was

quite spectacular. The man persisted that he was innocent."

Barbara heard Cordez draw a quick breath. She knew that her words had affected him. What had this man, a trapper, away off here in the wilds of the Northland, to do with Herbert Roth?

"Tell me!" Cordez was saying, his face close to hers. "Would you recognize this man if you saw him?"

"I am sure that I would," replied the girl, "in fact I believe I have already seen — and recognized him."

"Where?" The question plainly betrayed the man's perturbation.

"In Ft. Wrigley."

"Good God!"

It was apparent that this last information was the most disturbing of all.

"And now," said the girl, "will you tell me what you know of him?"

Without replying the man turned to the Indian.

"Go!" he commanded, and then finished his orders in Cree. The girl heard the Indian go towards the cabin to prepare for the journey in search of the escaped outlaw.

"I'm sorry," Cordez was saying hurriedly, "but I can't tell you anything. An' you sure was right about the Indian. He ain't fit to make any kind of a search so I got to go with 'im. There's provisions enough left — an' I'll come back."

"But you aren't going to leave us here alone — without any means of getting away!" exclaimed the girl.

"I'm sorry but I got to do it!" said the man, gruffly now, and taking her by the arm he urged her toward the cabin.

"You must go back into the room," he said. "You mustn't take no chances with your eyes, you know. I'll come back," he repeated.

The courtesy of the man, his treatment of the Indian, and his failure to give her the information concerning Herbert Roth, which she was certain he possessed, angered Barbara. She shook his hand from her arm.

"You needn't trouble to come back," she said, "I think we can manage very well without you. Besides, if you are seriously undertaking to follow this man, how do you expect me to believe you will come back? He has the dogs and is far ahead of you by now?"

Cordez did not reply. Instead, he grasped her arm and almost shoved her to the door of the bedroom. As they reached the door it was opened from the inside and Naomi stood upon the threshold. The bandage was off her eyes and they were looking at Cordez. Suddenly releasing Barbara the man sprang forward and clapped his hand over the Indian woman's mouth, at the same time pushing her violently back into the room, and closing the door.

Then, brushing past her and snatching his coat, gun, pack, and snowshoes, he burst through the outer door and was gone.

As the door slammed behind him, Naomi came out of the bedroom.

"Mees Clinton is gone?" she inquired.

"Clinton!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Yes," replied the Indian woman, "it is he change name."

The girl was thinking rapidly.

"Are you sure, Naomi? How do you know?"

"Very sure, Mees. Naomi eyes — they come back."

"But why should he choose to conceal his identity?"

"I don' know, Mees. It is not good!"

Slowly the full import of the situation dawned upon Barbara. Clinton of the Mounted. Herbert Roth!

During that day Barbara sat in the darkened room while Naomi busied herself about the cabin. The girl's mind was full of unanswered questions. From that night far back on the prairie when Lord Harold had first made his appearance beside their campfire, the web of events had been hopelessly tangling. What had begun as a search for her lost brother had developed into a mystery, complex and fraught with unpleasant and even sinister possibilities.

The fact that Clinton of the Mounted was in reality Herbert Roth, or so she believed, was what disturbed Barbara the most. She knew that the man had completed his term in prison, and this fact dispelled the possibility of his hiding under an assumed name to cover an escape. Why he had come to the North, and why he should be so much disturbed at having been recognized by her in Ft. Wrigley was puzzling indeed. The only solution which Barbara could imagine was that the man was seeking vengeance upon Steve for having convicted him.

It was along towards evening that an idea suddenly occurred to her. She went into the outer room where Naomi was preparing supper.

"Naomi," she said, "this Clinton — how long has he been in the Service?"

"About t'ree year, Mees," replied the woman.

"Three years! Are you sure?"

"Yes, Mees. He been commission' get Lor' Har'l'd t'ree year."

"Three years!" exclaimed the girl. "And Herbert Roth was in prison until one year and six months ago!"

Presently she asked again,

"Naomi, I want you to tell me something. I promise to keep it in strict confidence. I will not tell *anyone*, you understand?"

"Yes, Mees."

"I believe it was you who freed Lord Harold. I want you to tell me if I am right?"

Before the woman could reply there came the sound of scratching on the outside door and a dull thud, as though a heavy weight had fallen against it.

Naomi crossed silently and leaned against it, lis-

tening. There was no further sound. Slowly she lifted the latch, opened the door the fraction of an inch, and peered out. Then with a startled exclamation, she threw it wide and knelt beside the fur-clad figure which fell across the threshold.

"Mees Lisle!" she cried as she raised the limp head, "Mees Lisle!"

With a cry Barbara ran forward and fell on her knees beside them, her hands groping. Her fingers found the fur hood and crept swiftly to the thin features framed within it.

"John!" she cried as she gathered his head close in her arms. "John! John!"

And as she cried, the red film left her eyes and she saw once more the face of John Lisle.

For the first time the tension gave way, and the spirit of courage which had kept her up so long, and it was just a tired little woman who sobbed out broken phrases and terms of endearment into the ears of the man she loved.

For a week John Lisle lay on one of the bunks in the bedroom of the cabin before he was able to rise. Barbara and Naomi moved their belongings to the

outer room, where Barbara occupied the one bunk, and the Indian woman slept in her blankets on the floor before the fire.

On the morning after his arrival at the cabin, Lisle regained consciousness, and after realizing that Barbara was safe, his first thought was for Danny Blake.

It was with misty eyes that he told Barbara of the exquisite sacrifice of the tenderfoot.

"I must go back to him!" he cried as he tried to rise.

Gently the girl pushed him back.

"You cannot go," she said, while the tears flowed freely from her eyes, "you could never reach him. Naomi shall go."

Lisle's thin hand stroked her hair as she leaned across the edge of the bunk with her head on her arms and cried out her sorrow for the fate of Danny the perfect friend! For although they would spare no effort to find him, in their hearts they knew that it was practically a hopeless quest.

"Oh, Danny, Danny, why did you come?" cried the girl between her sobs. "It is so terrible! Almost any one else — but *not* Danny!"

And so, with a pack of provisions and plenty of

ammunition, Naomi started on the back trail in search of Danny Blake. Her instructions were, if she found him alive, to take him on to Fort Churchill. As soon as Lisle should be able to move on, he and Barbara would also start for the Bay. Secretly they all prayed that this might be soon, for provisions were low indeed.

After Naomi had left, Barbara told Lisle of her experiences since their parting. She told him of her former conviction concerning the identity of Clinton, and also of how that conviction had been unsettled by Naomi's statement as to the length of Clinton's enrollment in the Service.

"You must indeed have been mistaken," Lisle said, "as Naomi is quite right. Clinton has been in the Service three years, and has been on the trail of Lord Harold all during that time. That of course explains his hurried departure on the trail of the outlaw and his anger with the Indian whom he believed had liberated him, although I can't imagine why he should wish to hide his identity from you. That he is in some way connected with Herbert Roth certainly seems probable from what you have told me, but as Roth's body was found near the edge of the Barrens just two years ago, the

possibility of their being identical is eliminated."

"Roth's body!" exclaimed the girl. "Then Roth — is *dead?*"

"Yes."

"But why did you not tell me this when I told you of the cardcase?"

"It was not necessary," replied Lisle shortly.

Barbara was turning over the situation in her mind.

"Tell me," she said presently, "does Clinton know of Roth's death?"

"I don't know," replied Lisle, "possibly not. He has been to Dawson but three times since starting out on Lord Harold's trail, and matters aside from his own commission are not likely to have been discussed at headquarters."

Barbara sat silent for a long time. Presently she said, turning to look directly at Lisle,

"Was Roth — murdered?"

Lisle turned his eyes away.

"I cannot tell you that," he said. As he spoke an expression of pain passed over his face which caused the girl to lean forward and exclaim quickly,

"I have tired you by making you talk! I am so sorry!"

"No," said Lisle, "you haven't."

"I will leave you now," said Barbara, rising, "and I shall not tire you again with questions. For in spite of what you say, I am sure that I have. It is all a hopeless tangle — but after all, it is not for me to unravel. If I can only find Steve! That will be enough!"

The man on the bunk closed his eyes and turned his head toward the wall that the girl might not again see the ache that was in his heart.

At the end of a week's time Lisle was up and about and anxious to move on. Barbara also was restless after the many delays in her quest for Steve. Accordingly they prepared to leave at dawn on the following morning.

During the days in which Barbara tended to the wants of the sick man there had been no word of love between them. If each read what was in the other's eyes, they took care to conceal the fact. There was no mention of the impropriety of their circumstances. The causes for the situation were far too great to allow of any recognition of superficial niceties. In fact the thought had scarcely presented itself to either of them. To Lisle, who was

a part of this land in which things were vital and big and in which there was no place for small distinctions, the fact of their isolation together so many miles from civilization was no more unusual than any other of the situations in which he had found himself during the term of his service. And when Barbara thought of it, it was merely to feel a thrill of wonder and delight that there was a man in the world with whom such a situation should seem so devoid of any unusual significance.

They had finished their packing and were sitting before the fire before Barbara should go to her room. Lisle was unusually quiet, and Barbara saw the same expression in his eyes that had been there the day she had asked him if Roth had been murdered. Prompted by an impulse she could not resist, the girl leaned over and laid her hand on his arm, looking searchingly into his face as he gazed into the firelight.

"There is something troubling you," she said softly, "I know—and it is probably something which you cannot tell me. But I wish I could—help you!"

The firelight touched the edges of her dark hair

with an aureole of light and was reflected in the depths of her sweet eyes.

The man drew a deep breath as he turned and looked into them and his hand closed over hers.

"I wish I could tell you," he said, his voice betraying his emotion, "Barbara!"

As he spoke her name, almost in a whisper, he rose suddenly to his feet, drawing her up with him. For an instant they stood thus, their eyes speaking the words their lips dared not. Then as suddenly he released her and abruptly turned away.

"You must retire," he said. "We must start at dawn."

For a long time Barbara lay looking up into the rafters which were dimly lighted by the cold moonlight which filtered in through the tiny window. And looking down upon her was the memory of Lisle's face when they had stood together before the fire. The brilliant light and the intense shadow had thrown into bold relief the superb strength of him — the firm, straight mouth with its little wistful turn at the corners, and the deep grey eyes in which a great love and a great sorrow seemed struggling for expression. And then the boyish, ruffled

wisps of fair hair that straggled wantonly across the tanned forehead.

"Dear little boy!" she whispered, "and big wonderful man, all in one, I wonder what it is that troubles you? I know you love me—it was in your eyes to-night—and yet—there is something besides our isolation together which keeps you silent! But whatever it is, I know there is no blot against you—for you are *good*—through and through and *through*—and it is more because of *that*, than because you are so good to look upon, and so brave, and big—that I *love you!*!"

Suddenly, terrible in the intense stillness, there came a sound which caused the girl to spring from the bed like a white streak of lightning, cross the room to the door and stand trembling and horror-eyed on the threshold. The room was empty and the outside door stood open. By the dim light from the embers of the fire she saw the broken window and the pieces of glass that had crashed to the floor beneath it. And following with her eyes the thought in her mind, she saw the gleam of a bullet which stuck into the wall opposite the window. Unmindful of the freezing air which streamed in

through the open door, she sprang forward and out onto the top step.

Two men were fighting in the clearing in front of the cabin. They were clearly outlined in the moonlight as they lurched and pitched together in the deep snow. They fought silently, their hard breathing, and the sound of blows on flesh as an arm struggled free, being the only break in the dead silence. Barbara could not distinguish the one from the other, so tightly were they clinched and so rapidly did they lunge and writhe.

The girl stood as though turned to stone, her eyes fastened on the silent battle in wide-eyed horror. She knew that one of the fighters was Lisle, and she tried to call to him, but her voice would not come.

Suddenly one of the figures wrenched itself free, sending the other sprawling with a terrific blow under the jaw, and as he sprang back he whipped out his gun and aimed at the fallen figure. On the instant Barbara recognized the slim graceful outlines of Lord Harold!

As the outlaw aimed, Lisle struggled to his feet and lunged toward his opponent. With a terrified

gasp Barbara realized that he was unarmed. Lord Harold had pulled the trigger. He was not more than four yards away from the steps. With a cry that would have curdled her blood had she heard it from the lips of another, she shot headlong from the step, her arms above her head, her body arched as for a dive from a springboard. The cry startled the outlaw and the shot went wild. Just as the report sounded the girl's body crashed down upon the crouching man and tumbled forward into the snow upon the smoking gun.

And at the same instant, something else came out of the darkness and hurled itself upon the man!

For a moment there was a sickening crunch as a pair of iron jaws and gleaming fangs sank into human flesh and bone. With a terrible shriek of agony the outlaw went down under a great black body. Knife-like fangs gleamed in the moonlight as they struck for the man's throat.

Before Lisle could reach Barbara she had regained her feet and sprang for the great beast as it struck for the second time.

“Silver!” she cried, “Silver! Stop! Down! Silver! Down!”

Frantically she grasped for the long shaggy hair

of the dog's neck, twisted it in her fingers and pulled and jerked backward with all her strength. The dog seemed not to hear her. Crouching, he drew his muscles for another spring, just as Lisle caught his hind legs in a vice-like grip. With a snarl of rage the dog turned upon Lisle. But quick as he was, a pair of small white arms were quicker. They shot about his neck and closed like tiny bands of steel, and a cloud of heavy black hair fell forward across his face. The lunge was broken, and the girl and the dog went down together, struggling and kicking in the snow.

"Silver!" called a voice close to the shaggy ear, "Oh, *Silver*."

Suddenly the dog ceased struggling. With a low whine he tried to raise his muzzle to the face that was so close to his own. Slowly the arms which clung so tightly to his neck relaxed a little, and through the maze of her hair he found the soft, cold cheek of his beloved mistress, and lapped it with his tongue.

## CHAPTER TEN

When Lisle had taken the cold, trembling girl back into the cabin and assured himself that she was not suffering a great deal from the exposure, he went out to where the outlaw lay motionless in the snow. A dark stream was gathering about his head.

The outlaw was not dead. But the great dog had done the work of his vengeance thoroughly enough to convince Lisle that the man had almost reached the end of his last trail. He carried him into the cabin and laid him on the bunk in the outer room.

Barbara had tied Silver in the cabin. She was exhausted from her experience and badly scratched from her struggle with the dog, so for several hours she lay still. Then she went out to where Lisle was sitting beside the outlaw's bunk.

"Good!" said Lisle when he saw her, "I'm glad to see you're feeling well enough to get up."

Then coming over and taking both her hands in his he said gravely,

"You were splendid! If you hadn't acted just when you did you'd probably have been left alone in the middle of this wilderness with two dead men on your hands. As it is, there will be — but one."

Barbara looked quickly at the outlaw and then turned away. The man's face was indeed the color of death and there was a great gash across his forehead which Lisle could not hide with the coverlet.

"You think he's —"

"Done for," said Lisle. "He may come to for awhile, but I think he can't possibly pull through."

Barbara shuddered.

"It's terrible!" she whispered. "As bad as he is, I would have spared him a death like that if I could."

"You tried," replied Lisle, "splendidly! And after all, it spares him from what would be coming to him later on. By the way," he added, "how did you recognize Silver so quickly, and how do you suppose he managed to get here?"

"I don't know," Barbara replied, "I just seemed to know him. As for how he got here I can't imagine. He was certainly left for dead. But then when I look at him it occurs to me that it would take a good deal to kill him, after all."

" You are right," said Lisle, looking at the great dog as he lay at the end of the thong which tied him, his eyes fastened on Barbara in abject adoration.

" And I guess, judging from what I read in his eyes, that it would take a good deal to keep him from finding you!"

Barbara smiled and went over to the dog.

" Silver," she said as she knelt and buried her face in the long hair of his neck, " I want you to find Steve's trail, and follow him — like that!"

As she finished speaking there was a sound from the bunk. The outlaw had opened his eyes and was looking at them. Lisle crossed to him.

The man was struggling to speak. Lisle leaned nearer to him and in a moment he caught the words.

" He wants to speak to you," Lisle said to Barbara.

The girl crossed to the bunk and leaned over.

" You've done for me!" whispered the outlaw, looking up into her face with an expression which should have belonged on the face of an adoring child, " a woman — and what no man's been able to do! — But you're beautiful — so beautiful that I — and you're courageous — that's the best of all! So courageous that I — you won't believe it, but it's

true—I love you! I've laughed at courage in men—shoot them in the back if you can—was my motto!"

He paused for breath. Lisle brought him water, after which he went on again.

"There's just one other person in the world that I—wouldn't double-cross again if I could! He didn't have your courage, I think, but he's white—so white that he didn't make any distinction between a man that *was* and one that *wasn't*, when it came to fine points. It was out yonder. He found my trail and he followed me. He wore a red coat—and that was reason enough for me to shoot him. I took the coat and left him to die. He didn't. One day we came upon one another—suddenly—around a cliff. We both shot at once—and he got me—and I fell down the cliff. He knew who I was—and what I was—and he despised me. And yet he climbed down that cliff at the risk of his own life—and got me—and took me to his cabin! He took care of me—and pulled me through. And then when I thought I was well enough I drew on him so I could get away. He told me he didn't belong to the Mounted—any more. That he was wanted, too. But I shot him anyway—and bolted.

He looked like you, somehow — his eyes —” the man’s voice was rapidly growing weaker. Barbara had difficulty in catching the words.

“ I had seen this man before,” he was saying, his eyes on Lisle now, “ near the edge of a — lake — about three hundred — miles out from — Dawson — if — you ever — find him — *and you take him — I’ll haunt you —!* ”

Lisle came forward suddenly.

“ You must tell me — do you know where this man is now? ”

The outlaw nodded.

“ Yes,” he gasped, “ I know. But I won’t — tell you! ”

Lisle whispered hurriedly to Barbara.

“ You must get him to tell you if you can! ” he said, “ I believe it might be your brother! ”

“ Steve! ” exclaimed the girl, speaking aloud.  
“ But how —? ”

The outlaw stirred.

“ Steve! ” he repeated. “ Yes, that was it, Steve! ”  
And closing his eyes he appeared to swoon again.

“ We must bring him to, ” said Lisle, going for more water. “ A few words more, perhaps, and we’ll be near the end of your quest! ”

He worked over the man for a few minutes and was presently rewarded. The outlaw opened his eyes again. Barbara leaned over him and spoke quickly.

"Listen!" she said, "I have reason to believe the man you speak of is my brother. I have come into the North to find him. If you indeed love me as you say you do, you will tell me where he is!"

The outlaw did not reply at once. His eyes were on the girl's face. Then he said,

"Your brother! Yes, perhaps he is! I see it now — it is your eyes! They —"

"Tell me!" whispered the girl breathlessly. "You *must tell me!* Where is he?"

The outlaw tried to speak. His breath was coming in agonized gasps. He looked from Barbara to Lisle as though undecided. Then as she leaned closer she heard him whisper,

"If he — takes him I'll — *haunt him* —"

"He won't! He won't!" cried the girl. "He's helping me to find him! You must tell me — *you must* —!"

The outlaw was speaking again. His lips were close to the girl's ear. She strained to catch the words.

"Yes — he will. Steve's wanted — and he'll take him!"

A cold perspiration began to come out over Barbara. She did not understand the man at once, but there was something about what he was saying which gripped her with an instinctive fear. Her own voice was scarcely more than a whisper when she spoke again.

"He won't!" she repeated, "I tell you I won't let him! But you must tell me!"

The outlaw drew one long agonized breath and then his lips framed the words but no sound came through.

"You promise! — Cabin. Twenty — miles — north!"

Lord Harold died two hours later. Lisle buried him in a clearing some distance from the cabin. On a crude wooden tablet he carved the words, "Lord Harold."

During those two hours that the man and the girl sat by the dying man's bedside, but one question and one answer passed between them.

When Barbara had risen after hearing the last

words of the outlaw she had turned to Lisle, and he had read the question in her eyes.

"What does he mean?" she had said, "when he says that Steve is wanted and that you will take him? Is that true?"

"Yes," Lisle had replied, "it is true."

The girl went deathly white but she said nothing. Lisle thought she was going to fall and he put out his hand, but she drew back from him and went over to the chair beside the bunk. In that brief moment Lisle had read in her eyes the thing which he had dreaded.

When he came back from burying Lord Harold she was sitting where he had left her. She rose and faced him, pale but entirely composed.

"What are you going to do — now?" she asked evenly.

The bluntness of the question was rather unexpected. Lisle's glance shifted and fell, and his voice sounded strange as he replied.

"I'm going — after him."

The girl swayed a little but her words came clearly.

"And you've been after him all the time — for this?"

"Yes."

There was a long pause, in which the man wished the girl would not look at him so steadily. For the first time in his life he found it impossible squarely to meet the eyes of another. But the tone in which her next words were spoken made him start and look at her in amazement.

A flush had mounted to her face. Her eyes seemed to have grown twice their original size and in their depths was no longer the soft cool shadow of snow. A fire burned there!

"Two hours ago," she was saying slowly, "*I loved you!* I loved you as I always had believed I should some day love some man! I loved you because you were *good!* Because you seemed to me to be the one man I had ever met who would not do a cowardly thing! I can tell you that now, even though you have never spoken of love to me—because I see how very much I was wrong! and because I dislike you as I loved you—with all my heart!"

The man winced under the stinging words and the hard, merciless tone of her voice.

"What is Steve wanted for?"

"Murder!"

"Murder!" The pause which followed the terrified breathing of the word was the longest moment in the lives of either of these two. Lisle felt that if the girl fell he would not dare to touch her — that she had suddenly surrounded herself with something which he was too gross and too menial to approach. But she did not fall. She gripped the edge of the bunk and stared at him with horror and disbelief written upon her face.

"I don't believe it!" she whispered, "*I don't — believe it!*"

The man did not reply. There was nothing for him to say. He had anticipated her attitude.

"Murder!" breathed the girl again. "Of whom?"

Lisle swallowed hard.

"Herbert Roth," he replied.

For fully two minutes there was no sound within the cabin. Then suddenly the girl sank into the chair and buried her face in her arms across the edge of the bunk. Lisle stood looking at her for a moment, his hands gripped in an effort to control the emotion which surged over him. Then he turned and went out onto the steps.

When Lisle came back the room was empty. The door to Barbara's room was shut, Silver was gone. Apparently Barbara had taken the dog into the room with her — as partial solace, Lisle thought.

He put some extra sticks on the fire and sat down beside it. He knew it would be useless to attempt to sleep. Besides, the problem of what to do with Barbara was unsolved.

He could not leave her here alone, even with the dog as protection, and himself continue the search for Steve. Provisions were low, and it was too long a chance to take that he would be able to return to the cabin soon again.

He finally arrived at the conclusion that the best thing to do was to take Barbara to Fort Churchill and return at once in search of Steve.

To take her on the trail to Steve's cabin which was only twenty miles distant occurred to him, but he realized the difficulties which this course would involve in the end.

Dawn came in four hours. Lisle prepared breakfast and then, hearing no sound from Barbara's room he went across and knocked softly on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, a trifle louder, and when there was still no reply, he called,

"I'm sorry to wake you — but breakfast is ready — and we must start."

There was still no answer. Lisle listened a moment, and hearing no sound he knocked again. Then suddenly a thought struck him, and turning he strode to the outer door, beside which his and Barbara's snowshoes had hung. The peg on which the girl's had been was empty!

With an exclamation Lisle sprang back to her door and pounded loudly, then, hardly waiting for any reply, he tried it. It was bolted from the inside.

He went out and around the cabin to her window. It was open — and leading away from it in the direction of the north were the tracks of a pair of snowshoes — and a dog!

Lisle lost no time in making preparations to follow the girl. He grabbed the packs which they had prepared for their journey, and set forth upon her trail. She had a good five hours' start, as she had no doubt left while he had sat on the steps following those terrible few moments of her disillusionment. But in her haste she had taken no food, and he was confident that he could overtake her.

At eight o'clock the sky grew suddenly dark and

the wind blew down from the north. Lisle quickened his pace. If there was to be a storm he must reach her before it became intense. The packs were heavy and the night had been unusually warm so that the snow was soft and the shoes sunk several inches at each stride.

But he did not reach her before it broke. It was one of those which give little warning but which are none the less violent. Lisle was soon surrounded by a great whirling eddy of snow. He bent low to protect his eyes, and that he might not miss the trail ahead of him which was rapidly growing more indistinct. He was almost running in spite of the heavy load and the softness of the snow.

For two hours he kept up this pace and then he stopped and unstrapped one of the packs. It contained half of the provisions, and half of the ammunition which Barbara and Naomi had brought with them, and the other pack contained the rest. He divided the ammunition, put half of it with all the provisions into one pack, and started on again.

Barbara's trail had now become completely obliterated. But Lisle knew that she would continue to go north, unless the storm should become so intense that she should lose her direction.

For two hours more he mushed on at top speed. His back ached and his legs were numb. That Barbara could not be far ahead he felt certain, but the possibility of her swerving from the right direction sufficiently for him to miss her troubled him. If the storm would only cease!

Another hour wore away and his pace was considerably lessened. The wind blew steadily against him and he sank deeper at each step as the snowfall increased.

And then as suddenly as it had come the storm passed. And following it came a cold spell equaling the one during which Lisle and Danny Blake had lain helpless on the snowfield some time ago. The thermometer dropped to seventy inside of four hours!

The increased cold packed the snow harder so that it was easier travelling. Lisle kept a sharp lookout to the left and right in case Barbara had wandered from the straight course. The fact that she had no food, in view of the intense cold, troubled Lisle even though he knew it made his chances of overtaking her more secure. If he should have missed her! He would soon know — for now that

the snowfall had ceased he should shortly come upon her trail again.

Until nearly dark he trudged on. He figured he must be within five or six miles of the cabin. Some distance ahead he could dimly discern a line of trees. The cabin would be somewhere within their border. But where was Barbara's trail?

It was pitch dark when he reached the border of trees. To find either a trail or a cabin seemed utterly impossible. He stumbled on, walking into stumps which he could not see, and now and then stumbling over snowcovered rocks. The cold penetrated through his furs. His hands and feet were numb and his legs worked in heavy automation. The pack seemed to weigh tons and his back ached cruelly beneath the load of it.

Suddenly he walked directly into something which rose high before him in the blackness. He could not see it, but he knew it to be a wall, and feeling it, recognized the circular rough logs of the side of a cabin. With a groan he realized that he had found the place for which he had been searching, and that Barbara was not there!

He felt his way around to the door and after kicking away the drift of snow which was piled be-

fore it, he tried the latch. It yielded hard, but it was not locked. Once inside he dropped his pack to the floor and struck a match. A glance assured him that the cabin had been unoccupied for some time. Either the outlaw had lied, or Steve had left it some time before.

With a sick heart Lisle picked up the pack, swung it again to his shoulder, and went out, closing the door with a bang.

*"I'm a hell of a hero!"* he muttered savagely.

All night Lisle wandered about in the pitch blackness calling the name of Barbara. He made no attempt to keep a straight course. There was no need for it now. She was as liable to have gone one way as another and the only thing he could do was to attempt to make himself heard. The cold had crept through his every muscle. Each move was an effort. But he scarcely thought of it. Once he stopped, undid his pack and ate an end of bread, a piece of dried fish, and a handful of snow. He knew he must not let his vitality run too low. But although he was in need of the food it almost choked him.

At dawn he found himself two miles south of the

line of trees in which the cabin stood. Apparently he had wandered in the close vicinity all night. He made himself strong coffee and finished the loaf of bread. Then he struck east, still calling, using his mitten hands as a megaphone.

The dawn was grey and gave signs of further snowfall. Lisle kept circling slowly southeast, intending to circle his back trail and bring up at the cabin again in the hope that Barbara had finally arrived.

It was almost dusk when a tiny dark spot on the western horizon attracted his attention. He was staggering now at almost every stride and his lips were blue from the cold. Gathering all his remaining strength he quickened his pace and made for the spot.

When he came to within a quarter of a mile of it, it appeared to divide in half. The one half moved about, seeming to circle round the other. Lisle's pulse quickened and when he had gone a few yards further he put his mitten hands to his lips and called again.

“Barbara! Barbara!”

The moving spot stopped still, and with a sudden thought, Lisle called again, this time,

"Silver! Here, Silver! OH! SILVER!"

With a moan of relief and joy Lisle saw the dark spot begin to move toward him, and as it came steadily on Lisle called again,

"SILVER! SILVER!"

In less than five minutes the long black body of the dog had covered the distance, and had come to a standstill a few yards from Lisle. He seemed to realize that the man was indeed a friend. There was no show of animosity as on former occasions. He stood looking at Lisle for a moment as though to make sure, and then he turned and began to trot back over his trail, looking from time to time to see that Lisle was following.

Barbara lay doubled up in the snow, one arm flung above her head as she had fallen. Her face was ashen and her lips were blue. When Lisle gathered her in his arms Silver whimpered softly and tried to lap her face.

Lisle removed his coat and wrapped it about her, chafing her hands and holding a flask to her lips. Then he laid her gently on the snow, while he built a fire and prepared coffee. While he waited for the water to boil he went to her again, holding her head

on his knees, trying to coax warmth back into the small blue hands.

Finally the girl stirred and opened her eyes. Lisle was bending over her. For a moment she appeared dazed and then slowly she recognized him. For one fleeting second her eyes lighted up with a smile of joy and greeting — and then suddenly it died out, as she remembered. In that one moment Lisle had bent and kissed her, drawn by an impulse which he could not resist.

“Barbara!” he murmured, “Barbara!”

The girl groaned softly and turned her head away, struggling to rise. Lisle helped her to a sitting position and then, seeing her expression, he went over to the fire and began to pour the coffee.

She took the cup he offered in silence, evading his eyes. When she had sipped it she seemed to gain strength. A slight bit of color came into her cheeks and her eyes brightened. The fire was beginning to burn in them again.

“You kissed me!” she exclaimed, finally, her tone hard. “You dared to do that! I suppose you think you earned it for rescuing me! You didn’t!”

“I’m sorry,” said Lisle. It sounded banal. “I — I couldn’t help it.”

"No! I suppose you couldn't help your despicable method of tracking down my brother, either! Nor will you be able to help arresting him, if you find him!"

"No," Lisle replied more firmly, "I couldn't—and I'll have to."

"I know," the girl went on, "you will say it is the Law—that it is your *duty!* Ugh! It is indeed a helpless Law—and a strange duty which requires such means to work its ends!"

"What do you intend to do now?"

"Take you on," replied Lisle. "I went to the cabin. There was no one there. There had been no one there for some time."

The girl looked startled.

"Then Lord Harold—"

"Lied—or your brother has gone somewhere else. The dog will prove that one way or another. My plan is to go by way of the cabin for that purpose, and also to get some of the canned goods which I saw there. We will not take all of it, of course, but our own store of provisions are so low we could not make the mush, which is now over a hundred miles, without an extra stake. I tell you quite

frankly that there is a chance we will not be able to make it. But it is the only thing left to do."

Barbara considered a moment.

"I suppose it is," she agreed finally.

They reached the cabin an hour after dark. There was no fresh trail leading to the door. Once inside, however, there was no question but that Steve had been there, and recently. For Silver ran frantically about the two rooms, barking and whining, sniffing at everything, and especially at a red rag which hung on a nail near the sink. The rag had evidently served for the purpose of a dish cloth, although its texture was anything but adapted for the purpose. Lisle examined it and pronounced it of the material of which the coats of the Mounted were made.

"He's been here," said Lisle, "but there is no way of telling if he will ever come again. The provisions are very scarce — only a few canned things — and it would be foolish to think of waiting on the chance of his returning. We had better stick to the original plan. We'll bunk here to-night, however."

Barbara did not reply, but gathered up one of the blankets and went into the next room, closing the

door behind her with an emphatic slam, and bolting it noisily. Lisle looked after her for a moment and then he buried his face in his hands. Long into the night he sat there.

At dawn he knocked gently on her door. She replied at once, and in five minutes she came out of the room, nodding a curt good morning.

"I have left a note," said Lisle as they were ready to start a half hour later, "in case your brother comes back. I have told him that you were here and that you are going to Ft. Churchill. If he should come before another storm he would find our trail, and no doubt follow us."

Barbara's eyes narrowed.

"That was extremely thoughtful of you," she said evenly. "I see you have *my* interests in view — *as usual!*"

A flush rose to Lisle's face.

"You may do as you like," he said, "I will destroy it if you say so. I had not intended it as a lure."

"No! Of course you didn't! Leave it, by all means. Naturally you knew I should want you to!"

And so into the frigid dawn the man and the woman started out together on their long weary

journey across the snowfields. And the bleakness of the world about them was nothing compared to the sorrow in the heart of the man, and the cold as nothing to the chill in the heart of the woman, which was reflected mercilessly in her manner.

On the third day of their journey there came a storm. It was not a hard storm, compared with some of the previous ones, but it came just at the time when the travelers were in an open space. And coming at this time it caused the world about them to become one mass of grey-white in which there was no definition between the sky and what lay beneath it. And as three tiny living molecules in a churning, infinitesimal sea, in which there was neither east nor west nor measurable distance nor time of day, these three were lost.

For three days they wandered — in circles. The girl would have waited upon the snow for the storm to cease, saying that then they could distinguish the east from the west. But the man knew that there were few provisions and that there was less fuel — and inaction meant fuel,— and to go on meant the chance of coming upon *something*, whether it be a

cabin, a landmark that should tell him where they were, or another wayfarer.

And it was cold — very cold. At the end of the fourth day they knew that the cold was now their greatest enemy. Hour by hour it had crept deeper into their blood, until even the fires which they built more often seemed to have little affect.

On the seventh day the sun came out. But it seemed far away and appallingly ineffective. Their eyes smarted from the unaccustomed brilliance and they wished almost that it would go in again. The thermometer rose only five degrees during the day.

On the ninth day their fuel was gone. There was but half a pound of beans, a few dehydrated potatoes, and a little coffee. There was no landmark to tell them where they were — except that the sun had guided them east again.

For two more days and nights they struggled on, each with set lips and haggard eyes. Lisle groaned inwardly as he looked at the girl.

She scarcely seemed to see him, seldom spoke. She accepted his proffered assistance at times when it was absolutely necessary, and politely refused it when it was not. On the trail he pushed ahead, and

the girl chose to follow with Silver at a good many yards' distance. Many times she would turn and look behind her.

When Lisle told her that their fuel was gone she merely nodded her head in silent acceptance of the inevitable. And when, three days later, they ate the last mouthful of their provisions, she made no comment.

Lisle shot a snowshoe rabbit and a ptarmigan. There was no other life stirring. When he offered the raw flesh to the girl, after carefully cleaning it, she accepted it and began to eat without hesitation. She seemed to do everything with a sort of numb automation, as though all things had become equal in the proportion of their significance.

On the fourteenth day the sun left them again, and again the east was lost. The thermometer seemed to stand still. Lisle shot a snowbird, but it had little meat on it.

In the afternoon a great drowsiness began to take hold of the girl. Lisle had seen the droop of her eyelids, and he looked back often as they continued their course. It was a zig-zag course now, and twice Lisle insisted that Barbara walk beside him — but she refused.

At about dusk Lisle stopped and waited for her. Her eyes were strangely expressionless, and there was a forward lurch to each step that she took. He held out his hand to her and automatically she put hers into it, without looking at him.

Then slowly her eyes began to close.

Lisle shook her arm.

"Barbara!" he cried, and his voice sounded like some strange far-off thing, "you must not! You *must* keep awake! Don't you know that if you go to sleep now you may not wake again? It's trying to get me too — and if it should get both of us!"

But the girl did not hear him. She sank down upon the snow, a dead weight.

The man knelt beside her, shaking her, but to no avail. Then he gathered her in his arms and swung her across his shoulders. As the darkness came on he struggled on with his burden.

The night was clear and there was a quarter-full moon. It had never seemed so cold as it was now. The distant boom of the cracking tree trunks in the forests and the metallic sound of the ironlike crust over which he trod gave further evidence of its intensity. Far away there rose the wolf-cry — the hunting cry of a starving pack.

At midnight the man lowered his burden and dropped down in the snow beside the girl, scanning her face. It looked unearthly there in the half moonlight. It was pinched and drawn and utterly colorless. And as he looked it seemed to fade farther and farther away.

The man brushed the sleeve of his coat across his eyes as though to brush away a mist. The moon seemed to have become a dim far-off star. Something moved near him and he turned as one in a trance. The thing was standing beside the girl, very close to her face. It was dark, and it was gradually becoming smaller. Dimly he remembered that there had been someone with them — something — it was a dog, that was it, a tiny little furry dog that trotted along behind the girl — yes, that was it — and now it was licking her face — or no, perhaps it was but a shadow — a shadow that the sun had made — the *sun* — no, there had never been a sun — he had dreamed that — perhaps he was dreaming now. If he was, he must awake, because Barbara was asleep — and he must keep awake! If he went to sleep now, they would die — here together on the snowfield! Die — here — together —

Suddenly he seemed to hear a voice. It came

from very far away — from his memory, in fact. It was the voice of Barbara, and she was saying, "I loved you! I loved you as I had always believed I should some day love some man — some man who could not do *a cowardly thing* —"

"*I'm awake, Barbara!*" he whispered, "*I'm awake! I will not sleep, dear! A cowardly thing, sleep! Warm, pleasant, sleep! But cowardly —*"

He stopped short. High upon the freezing air rose the mournful howl of a dog!

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Barbara awoke with the feeling that she had been asleep for a long time. She did not open her eyes at once. Somehow she felt that when she should open them she would feel cold again — and it was very warm now.

Her hand felt instinctively for Silver's neck, and she realized that her mitten was off. It was strange that her fingers were not cold. Even the snow was warm — and queerly enough it was soft — and yielded to the weight of her hand. She must still be dreaming.

Her fingers came in contact with Silver's muzzle and she heard the dog whine softly, and then she felt the lick of his rough tongue.

Suddenly she remembered Lisle. Where was he? Had he gone to sleep, too, or was he sitting there beside her, waiting for her to wake? He had said that they must not both go to sleep —

With a sudden fear at her heart she opened her

eyes—and they looked straight into a pair that were very like them. For a moment she was sure she was dreaming—and then with a cry she stretched out her arms and drew down the head which bent above her.

“Steve!” she cried, “Steve!”

“Little sister!”

For a moment neither spoke. The girl was crying softly, while the man stroked her hair, and murmured her name.

“Thank God!” he whispered. “You’re all right!”

Slowly, then, the realization came to the girl that she was not on the snowfield—that she was in a room, on a bunk, and that there was a fire burning brightly somewhere near her. Again she remembered Lisle.

“Where is—”

“Over there,” her brother replied, and his tone caused her to turn quickly towards the bunk on the opposite side of the room. Lisle lay on the bunk. His eyes were closed and his arm hung limply over the edge.

“Steve!”

“Yes, little sister!”

"Is he — will he —"

"He is pretty much all in," Steve interrupted gravely.

The girl closed her eyes.

"Tell me," she said presently, "how did you find — us?"

"Silver," replied Steve. "I found Lisle's note at the cabin, and I tried to follow you — but on account of the storm I lost your trail. I was wandering about looking for it when I saw the dog coming. He was following me — had found my trail where it had crossed yours. He'd evidently gone back from the place where Lisle gave up — for help I suppose. When he found me he started back to you at once. I got there just about in time. Lisle had carried you several miles — and was nearly gone. Oh, little sister, why did you come?"

"I came to find you, Steve, and to find the thing that was in your letter — happiness! And I have found you —" her voice faltered.

"But not — the other?"

There was the slightest pause before she replied. Then throwing her arms about his neck again, she cried,

"Oh, Steve dear, yes, I am happy — so very, *very*

happy that I have found you!" Then holding him off from her and looking up into his face she asked,

"Steve — the note — did he sign it?"

"Yes."

"And you came — anyway?"

"Of course I came! How could you even imagine that I would not?"

A glimmer of hope came into Barbara's face.

"Tell me," she cried, "I must know — Steve, is it true that — you are — wanted?"

The man drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he replied, "it is true."

"Oh, Steve!" she breathed, but her arms did not relax.

For several moments there was silence in the room. Then Steve gently released her arms from his neck and took her hands in his.

"I'm sorry you came, little sister," he said gravely, looking into the firelight. "There is no happiness for you here. I thought I had found it because I was living a life which had always appealed to me. But I've lost it now — and I'll never find it again. And what is worse I've killed the chance for yours! They'll take me, now, and you'll go back — back with the memory of it — and

the blot — oh, Barbara, Barbara!” The man was sobbing now. The girl endeavored to soothe him, stroking his hair, telling him that she was not going back, *ever* — and that for whatever he had done, there was a good reason, she knew, and that he would never be convicted — *never!*

Presently Steve got control of himself.

“Little girl,” he said, “when you are stronger I will tell you all about it. I want you to know. In the meantime I must get you something to eat — and see what can be done for Lisle. By the way, he’s — he calls for you — often.”

The girl turned her face away and closed her eyes. Her lips set in a hard straight line.

“Does he?” she replied dully.

It was the afternoon of the following day before Steve told Barbara the story of why he was wanted by the Mounted for the murder of Herbert Roth. Lisle still lay unconscious, but Barbara had improved considerably.

“It happened on the banks of a lake at the end of the Bonnet Plume River. I had been out on the trail of an outlaw, named ‘Robin Hood’ on account of his habit of robbing the rich and never the poor,

and of sending his booty to addresses in the poor section of Chicago.

"It was just dusk. I had made camp earlier than usual. Shortly after I had lighted my fire I noticed another, some distance behind me, and I decided to investigate. It was almost dark when I started towards it. When I had come to within several hundred yards of it I heard a man's voice crying out in terror. The cry was closely followed by two shots. I hurried on. I was on foot. When I had gone a little further I saw something between me and the other firelight, and I made it out to be the silhouette of a bear. And fleeing before it was that of a man. I ran forward at top speed, whipped out my gun, and fired. At the same instant the man turned to dart to the right, so as to avoid running into his campfire. The bullet missed the bear, and passed on to the man. And at the same instant I did, someone else shot from the other side! The man threw up his hands and fell to the ground. There came several more shots and one tore through the bear's ear and hit me in the shoulder. By that time I had reached the fire and was about to lean over the man when another shot came out of the darkness and got me in the breast. The only thing I remem-

ber after that was seeing the bear running away in the direction of a clump of bushes on the edge of the stream.

"When I came to I was lying in the stream with my head on a rock that projected above the water, I had been thrown there, apparently. The ice was thin and I'd gone through. My coat was gone. I tried to rise but could not. Just then a man parted the bushes on the opposite shore, and seeing me, waded in and pulled me out. I went off again, and when I came to the next time I was lying beside a campfire and the man who pulled me out of the stream was binding up my wounds. I recognized him then.

"'Hello, "Robin Hood," I said. 'Right, am I not?'

"'None of your business,' he replied.

"'Oh, yes it is,' said I, 'almost *all* of my business, in fact.'

"'You ain't in no condition to carry out your business,' he answered, 'an' when you are I'll be so far away you won't be able to. I'll give you a good start, but I'm not nursin' you clear through to health an' prosperity!'

"'Who shot me?' I inquired.

"‘Don’t know. I didn’t. Who shot the other fellow?’

"‘Don’t know,’ I said.

"The man laughed. ‘Well, I’d like to see you prove it!’ he said.

"‘Is he dead?’ I asked, the full import of what the man had inferred breaking upon me.

"‘Dead he is,’ replied the outlaw, ‘with a bullet in his heart an’ another in his arm.’

"‘Any clues as to who he is?’ I asked.

"‘Yep. A cardcase, entitled Herbert Roth.’

"You can imagine the affect the name had upon me. Herbert Roth had sworn his innocence to the last. His term was up — he had come north — for what purpose I could only guess. He was found dead with my bullet in his heart, and there was only one conclusion to be drawn."

Barbara was listening intently.

"But, Steve," she cried, "why couldn’t you be cleared on ‘self-defence’? If it was discovered that Roth was after you for vengeance, which he probably was? And there were the bullets in your breast and shoulder to prove that you had been shot!"

Steve shook his head.

"If Roth's purpose was vengeance he would not likely have confided in anyone. Besides, the bullets which I had in me were not Roth's bullets!"

"Were they Robin Hood's?"

"No. They belonged to a gun of German make — a Lüger."

"Did you find any clue as to who did fire them?"

"Nothing conclusive. Robin Hood found snow-shoe tracks, and beyond them the tracks of a team and driver. They followed my trail from some distance back and had apparently been attracted, as I had been, to investigate Roth's campfire. After the shooting my assailant had stolen my coat, and for some unexplainable reason had taken great care to go over the bear's tracks in the snow and thoroughly obliterate them. It appeared like a deliberate attempt to clinch the evidence of the shooting of Roth against me, and to remove any chance of my proving that I had done it to save the man from the attack of the bear.

"To go on, while Robin Hood tended to me, about a mile to the north of the scene, someone found the body of Roth and took it toward Dawson by dog-team. Robin had refused to return and bury the

body, being afraid to take the chance of being caught.

"Two days later Robin prepared to move on. When he was all ready to go he sat down beside me and said,

"Don't know whether you've given it much thought, or not, but somehow I reckon mebbe you have. An' if you have you've come to the same conclusion as me, which is that you're just about as much an outlaw as I am, about now. I ain't got a murder to my credit so far, and so help me I hope I never have. I ain't holdin' it against you, but the courts would. I'm leavin' you now. Not because I'm afraid of you, because I ain't, and not because I want to, because I don't. I like you an' it's lonesome up here. I ain't hankerin' after the company of most I come across up here. That there's meant for a partin' compliment — mebbe. It wouldn't be healthy for me here if our mysterious friend of the Lüger gun should come this way again."

"I slowly gathered what he was getting at. I didn't want him to leave me. I liked him. He wasn't well educated, by schooling, but he'd spent a deal of time learning things about wildflowers,

and birds and the animals of the region. I was sick, and weak. And I was wanted for murder. I thought of the years behind the bars. When Robin Hood rose to go I said,

“ ‘ If you’ll wait ’til I’m able, I’ll go with you.’ ”

“ ‘ I was hopin’ you’d figure that way,’ was all he said, as he laid down his pack.

“ We left the spot in a week. He took me to this cabin after we’d rambled along all through the winter and the next summer. The oppression of the thought of the murder slowly left me, and I was happy! I couldn’t help but be, even in spite of what had happened. You know how I always wished for some wild, free life without any rules or regulations. As much as I liked the life with the Mounted there was always that feeling of being *under* the orders of someone else that took away its full enjoyment. I can’t help it. It seems to be in my blood. I loved the life of an outlaw!”

As he finished Barbara looked up into the wistful blue eyes, and at the sensitive mouth that was not quite firm enough, and suddenly she remembered the words of Lord Harold:

“ He didn’t have your courage, I think — but he was white!”

She reached out her hand to him.

"Steve," she said softly, and there was a note of excitement in her voice, "I understand. And I think I can tell you several things that will interest you!" And she proceeded to tell him of her experiences with the one-eared bear, with Lord Harold — of the finding of the cardcase — the "argument with a gentleman on this exact location" of which Lord Harold had spoken — and finally of the outlaw's words as he lay dying. She told him also of the arrest of Robin Hood in Ft. Wrigley, and of the strange connection which Clinton of the Mounted seemed to have with the affair.

Steve listened with absorbed interest. When she told of the arrest of his outlaw partner he uttered an exclamation and the expression in his eyes spoke the sincerity of his friendship for the man who robbed the rich to give to the poor.

"Ft. Wrigley!" he exclaimed when Barbara had paused. "He must have gone there to mail the package!"

"Yes," said Barbara, "he did. He had it with him when he entered the store. And strangely enough, too, he seemed curiously interested in me. He seemed to want to say something to me. I have

thought about it often. Do you suppose it was because of our resemblance?"

"Yes," replied Steve, "I think so, probably. I had told him about you. And the package—did you see the address?"

"No," said Barbara.

"If only you had!" exclaimed her brother, "for it was addressed to you! I had sent you a black fox skin. Then you might have been spared this terrible experience, for Robin would have told you—and stopped you from coming further."

"Indeed he would not have stopped me!" cried the girl. "I should have come just the same! Oh, Steve, dear, I am so glad that I have found you! And I shall never let you go—*never!*"

"Yes, little sister," said Steve, his voice husky with emotion, "you will. You'll have to. I'll have to go back—with Lisle!"

Barbara glanced quickly at the man on the opposite bunk. Then reaching up and drawing her brother down to her she whispered,

"You shall never go with him! He is unable to stop you now, and you must escape!"

Steve smiled sadly.

"And you?" he asked.

"Will go with you!"

The man drew up sharply.

"Nonsense, Barbara, please do not talk like that! This is no country for a woman. The places in which I should be obliged to hide now, if I should escape, would be impossible for you. One never knows, up here, when food will be found again, and there are many dangers. Don't speak of it again."

"Steve," insisted the girl, "why can't you understand that I should love that life as much as you love it — that I have the 'tang' in my blood, too — you remember, that's what Grandfather Barrows called it — 'the tang of the north!' And oh, Steve, I've felt the 'tang,' and I've been through the dangers that *men* go through because they answer the call of it, and I've survived them! And I don't want to go back — I'd never be happy there — unless you were with me! And I went through those dangers to find you, Steve, and now that I have found you, you would send me back! Oh, Steve, dear, you cannot do that!"

"Barbara, when you started to search for me you did not know that I was 'wanted.' That changes

everything, and I'm surprised that your common sense does not tell you how impossible is the thing which you suggest! It *is* impossible! *Utterly!*"

"That's what Commissioner McLean told me at Dawson! And I have proven that it wasn't! Besides, if common sense out-weighed all our desires you would not have gone with Robin Hood when you did! You would have gone back — and tried to prove that you were innocent!"

"I am not innocent. I killed a man. And in the sight of the Law I am guilty, although I believe that in the sight of God it is the motive which counts."

"Nevertheless you chose the life of an outlaw because you thought you should love it. And you did! And I should love it too, if it were with you!"

"It is no use, Barbara. I would not hear of it. I must go back. We must go back — together — with him!"

"It seems quite like old times!" replied the girl, "that we should disagree, and it will be quite like old times that I shall finally get my way!"

"We shall see. At any rate we could not leave Lisle until he is able to shift for himself — and that does not promise to be soon."

"No," replied the girl slowly, a strange note creeping into her voice, "we cannot leave him—yet!"

When Lisle was sufficiently recovered to realize the turn events had taken, he was sick at heart. For he knew that he owed his life to this man whom he must now arrest for murder — this man whose sister he loved more than anything in the world. He would be able to travel in a few days. And then would begin that terrible journey. If they had only left him out there on the snowfield!

And so, a few evenings later, after Barbara had retired for the night, Lisle called Steve to him.

"I suppose you know," he began, going at once to the point, "that I am obliged to arrest you — to take you back on the charge of murder."

"I know."

"I say 'obliged' because it's going to be the hardest thing I ever did in my life."

There was a slight pause before Steve answered, then he said slowly,

"Am I right in presuming that there is another reason than that you practically owe your life to me?"

Lisle was not expecting the direct question.

His glance dropped to the table before which they stood.

"Possibly you are," he replied slowly, "but that is neither here nor there — *now*."

For a moment neither spoke. Then Lisle looked up again and asked suddenly,

"Did you kill Roth?"

It was Steve's turn to look away. For him, too, the direct question had been unexpected.

"I suppose so," he replied. "In any case, I cannot prove that I didn't. I will tell you the story of the shooting."

"Go on." They seated themselves.

When Steve had finished, Lisle sat silent, thinking. He was piecing things together as Barbara had done. Finally he said,

"It looks bad. You'll have to go back."

"I expected to," Steve replied.

"I'm fit for travel now. We'll start to-morrow." Then rising, he added, "In the meantime I must formally arrest you, in the name of —"

"If you ever finish that sentence, *I'll kill you!*"

The voice was Barbara's, low pitched and intense. She had entered the room unobserved. She stood now with her back against the door of her

room, a coat thrown over her night dress, her lovely hair tumbling about her shoulders. Her hand held her revolver and its muzzle was just three feet from Lisle's heart.

No one would have guessed that she had ever loved the man at whom her eyes were levelled. For a moment the three stood as though turned to stone, and then the girl spoke again, her voice low and strange with suppressed emotion.

"I've been waiting for this! For the moment when you should claim for yours the man you did not capture!"

There was a pause as the two men realized the meaning of her words, and then she went on, slowly, her steady gaze never for an instant leaving Lisle's face.

"The man who sent you after Steve sent me! My outfit was supplied by the Mounted! It was I who got the information from Lord Harold as to where to find my brother — and it was my dog that found him! Therefore he is my prisoner — and I choose to set him free!"

"His pack is ready. It is outside the door. He's going back to the mountains — back to freedom — and when he has forgotten, happiness!"

"Barbara!" It was Steve's voice, imploring. "For God's sake try to understand that I can't get away now even if I would! Lisle would come after me again!"

"No doubt! But not until you are far away—and safe—for I am going to hold him here until you are!"

"And you, little sister?"

"You refused to escape with me, so you'll have to go without me. I'm going on. And wherever I go from here I shall be happy because I shall know that you are not behind bars for a crime which, by all that is fair in the sight of God, you did not commit!"

A flush had mounted to Lisle's face.

"It will do you no good to perpetrate your brother's escape," he said. "If you are successful now it will only mean the postponement of his capture. My duty is to take him back—and that's what I'm going to do!"

"Your duty! A worthy duty, indeed, that cannot attain its ends without employing such means as you have used! A worthy oath for which to live—and for which to die! If it is to such that men here who are considered good consecrate their honor

and their lives, then I am indeed glad that I am going back — back where the gold in the hearts of men are covered with the gilt of the superficial lives they lead — but who, when the time of the testing comes, prove of what metal they are made — as Danny Blake proved his!"

"The law must be fulfilled!"

"The law! *Whose law!* The law of men, seldom just, and never merciful — which makes men suffer when they have done no wrong — and robs them of their birthright — freedom! *Damn the law!*"

For minutes the two men stared at the girl, speechless. Was this the Barbara they had known — the cool-eyed girl with the gentle voice? Only Steve had ever seen eyes just like that before. They were the eyes of Grandfather Barrows, from whom they had received their fighting blood!

In those few moments Steve realized that the girl had won. That the blood of the conqueror was stronger in her than it was in him. And this blood was roused to back him in a fight for freedom — the doors were open — and all he had to do was to walk

through and try once more to lose himself in the mountains which he loved.

If he failed to go — if he returned with Lisle and was put into prison, Barbara would be no happier — no less disgraced. And perhaps Lisle would not find him again! He had eluded capture so far, in fact it was of his own free will that he had walked into it now! Barbara was speaking again, commanding him in that strange compelling voice, to go!

For another minute he hesitated. Then with his eyes on his sister's face, he moved toward the door.

"Good-by, Steve!" The girl's voice was unsteady, but it betrayed no signs of the weakening of her purpose.

"Good-by — little — sister!" The last word ended in a sob. The next instant the door closed behind him.

For twelve hours Barbara held Lisle at the point of her gun. After Steve had left she had commanded the officer to sit in one of the chairs, and then slowly backed into the other, resting her elbow on the edge of the table. The fire burned low and the room grew chilly, and then cold.

Lisle sat looking into the fire, his eyes half closed. His face was masklike, but there was an alertness about his attitude which was not lost on Barbara. The small hand held the gun steady, though it ached cruelly from the strain, and her eyes burned from the constant effort to keep them open. Neither spoke.

It was broad daylight when Barbara dropped the gun on the table and slid forward with her head on her arms. It seemed as though she could move no further. Lisle got up and without a word prepared to build the fire. He made coffee and flapjacks, and set the table on the opposite side from where Barbara sat. When the meal was ready he called her.

She had not gone to sleep, but she did not move. Lisle shook her gently by the shoulder.

"Come," he said, "you must eat. You are thoroughly exhausted."

The girl raised her head wearily and brushed back the hair from her eyes. Her lids were heavy.

"When are you going?" she asked dully.

"When you've had some rest. You can't go until you have had."

"I?"

"Certainly. Do you suppose I'm going to leave you here alone?"

There was a new note in his voice. It was brusque, almost hard, and entirely impersonal. Barbara looked at him quickly. This was a different Lisle than she had known!

"You are going with me — to the Fort?" she asked.

"Of course."

"And then?"

"You may take care of yourself. You seem quite capable of doing so." Somehow the words did not convey a compliment.

"And you —"

"I am going after your brother. I want you to eat something, now, and rest for hours. Then we will start. Come." He held a chair for her.

"And if I do not wish to?"

"You will do so anyway. You've had your way quite long enough. I'm going to have mine for a while."

The girl knew that she was in need of food, and rest. But Lisle's attitude aroused the last spark of spirit which she possessed.

"And how do you propose to arrange that?" she asked.

Without a word Lisle strode forward, and before she was aware of his intention he had picked her up, chair and all, and deposited her in front of the place at the table which he had laid for her.

As he pushed the chair into place a sound from outside the cabin arrested their attention. They listened, and it came again. From somewhere across the clearing a man's voice was calling,

"Hello-o! Hello-o!"

Lisle opened the door and went out. The call came again, nearer.

"Hello!" Lisle answered, using his hands for a megaphone.

Two men came out of the brush beyond the clearing, and on toward the cabin. They were not young men, and they bent low under the weight of their packs. The one was short and inclined to flesh, and he puffed with each step. The other was angular and tall, with a straggly grey beard which partially hid his weather-beaten face, which wore a very generous grin. It was at this one that Lisle stared as though scarce believing his eyes.

"Brewster!"

"By all the blasted mountains if it ain't!" exclaimed the angular one boisterously, striding forward and seizing Lisle's hand in a vice-like grip.

"For God's sake where did you come from?"

"Same place you did. Alaska. Only I was some late an' you got a couple o' years' start o' me."

"Couldn't stay away, eh?"

"You guessed it! No more'n any old fire-horse, I couldn't. Have to have one more grand an' glorious freezin' mush before I travels down my last trail. An', says I, there ain't no better trail can be found for a last one than in the land of the Yukon!"

Then turning to his companion, he said,

"This here's Father Corriveau. Him and me used to talk over the hereafter together when I was forgettin' my past. We've both changed some since then, but we still agree that the best kind of a present a man can have is right up here in the mountains with nothin' but a gun an' a hopeful bosom!"

Lisle shook the priest's hand and then turned to open the door of the cabin. As he did so, Brewster asked,

"Is the — lady — here?"

Lisle showed his surprise.

"How did you know?" he asked.

Brewster grinned mysteriously.

"I ain't been followin' you all for nigh ten months  
for nothin'!" he said.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

"Well?" said Lisle as the three men drew back their chairs after a hearty breakfast.

"Now, you old snow-rover, tell me why you have been following me about for nine months?"

The ever-ready grin spread over the old man's face.

"There's two reasons," he replied. "One's the one I left Alaska with, an' the other's the one I picked up in Dawson."

"Dawson? You've been following me from Dawson?"

"Just that, young fellow, an' a pretty chase you've led me! I lost you as many as five or six times."

"Serves you right. But now you have me, what are you going to do with me?"

The old man did not reply, but rose and crossed to where his coat hung by the door. He fumbled about in the pockets and then, drawing out a long business envelope, he came back and handed it solemnly to the young officer.

"If you'd 'ave got this about eight months ago," he said, "it'd saved you a hell of a lot o' trouble!"

Lisle glanced at the seal on the envelope and then broke it and drew out the contents. It was one sheet of paper with the letter-head of the Mounted. It was addressed to Lisle, dated June 2nd, and it contained but a few words.

"Bullet in Roth's heart Lüger. Barrows cleared. Tell his sister and continue search together. Brewster will make excellent guide—and chaperon.

"MCLEAN."

Lisle folded the letter and put it back in the envelope. His face was serious, but there was a note of relief in his voice as he said,

"Miss Barrows must see this at once."

He crossed to her door and knocked softly. A very faint voice replied from within.

"Well?"

"I have something here which you will wish to see at once," called Lisle. "Shall I put it under the door?"

There was no reply, but in a few seconds the door was opened and Barbara stood on the threshold. She was fully dressed and one glance at the room

assured Lisle that she had been preparing for the journey. Lisle introduced her to the two men. At the mention of Father Corriveau's name she started a little and looked at him searchingly, then turned her attention to the envelope which Lisle held out to her.

"Brewster brought this," explained Lisle.

She ignored the chair which Lisle pulled out, and opened the letter. For a full minute she stared at the words without a change of expression. Then to the amazement of the three men she turned the color of ashes and crumpled up upon the floor.

It was characteristic of a girl of Barbara's temperament that she should go bravely through experiences and dangers which would have caused the majority of women to faint, and show her first signs of weakness when the wonderful news of her brother's exoneration was brought to her. The courage which had lived in her for so long was no longer needed, and her tired spirit had suddenly relaxed and demanded the rest which was its due. For several days Barbara lay upon her bunk scarcely moving, while the life of her spirit slowly returned.

During this time the new problem which had

opened up for them was not discussed. There was no question in the minds of either the girl or Lisle but that they would now continue the search for Steve with renewed vigor. And as McLean had written, Brewster, veteran of the snows, would make an excellent guide. But the shortage of provisions and fuel was the thing now to be considered. The stores which they had found in the cabin were insufficient for any extensive journey, and Brewster and Father Corriveau had with them only what they would need.

Lisle had discussed the affair of the search for Steve to some extent with Brewster, after discovering that McLean had taken him into his confidence. He told him the most important phases of their past experiences, and learned that McLean had wired him at Ft. Simpson, thinking that he would go there instead of Ft. Wrigley.

Father Corriveau had sat silent during these talks between the two men, apparently either uninterested or by way of effacing himself in view of being an outsider. But one evening when the name of Clinton of the Mounted was mentioned Father Corriveau suddenly sat up in his chair and exclaimed,

“ Clinton! Why, that must be the man —”

" You know of him? " asked Lisle as the priest paused.

Father Corriveau considered a moment. Then he said,

" Yes, I am sure, that was the man. He said he belonged to the Mounted."

The two men waited with interest for him to go on.

" It was about a week before I met Brewster here. I was up yonder in Lost Valley in a cabin which belonged to the outlaw who has figured so much in your search for Barrows — Lord Harold. He built the cabin and called it Hope Castle. It was wonderfully built, and merited its name by reason of its position, which was on the crest of a spruce covered cliff which overlooked the entire surrounding country, and also because of the effect of its six chimneys.

" I have made no distinction between men since I forsook the priesthood for the mountain life. It is hard to draw a line between a good and a bad man. Lord Harold was bad — and yet — there were times — but that is neither here nor there, now. It is enough that I met him one day in the hills, and as with all men, I made friends with him and have

since many times shared the hospitality of his cabin.

" Well, as I was saying, one day about a week before I left the cabin for another venture into the hills, I looked down from my lofty veranda and saw a man coming across the snowfield. I got the glasses which Lord Harold always kept on hand, and after deciding that the man was not Lord Harold, who had been gone for some time, I went down to meet him.

" It took me a good half hour to reach him, and when I did he was sitting on the snow, staring ahead with the eyes of a man gone mad. When he saw me he cried out in terror and would have ran away, but he could not rise.

" I spoke to him, assuring him that I was a friend. I was used to meeting men with the Great Fear in their eyes. It is the outlaw's country.

" My words seemed to reassure him. He allowed me to help him up to the cabin, where I cared for him until he was able to go on again. The man had been starving.

" While he was in the half-mad state in which I found him he talked a good deal. I did not pay much attention to it at the time. It has been much in my life to forget the words of men. But several times

as I have sat with you while you talked together here, his words have come back to me.

"I learned that his name was Clinton — and that he belonged to the Mounted. And I also learned that there was someone that he was afraid to meet. Several times he spoke of a woman. He did not mention her name, but he cried out often that she would recognize him — that she *had* recognized him!

"When the time came for him to go he was loth to do so. The madness had gone but the Great Fear was still there. I gave him provisions enough to see him to the nearest post, where he said he was going. Just before he left I reminded him that I was a priest, and asked him if there was anything he would like to say to me.

"He hesitated for a few moments, and then he made confession. I cannot tell you that. I am still a priest. But I can tell you one thing of which I am convinced — and that is that Herbert Roth was an innocent man — a man convicted on false evidence for a crime which he did not commit!"

There was silence in the room when Father Corriveau finished speaking. The two men were

weighing his words and endeavoring to find a place in the puzzle of events for this new piece. Herbert Roth was innocent! He had served his term, and then he had come to the North in search of vengeance on the man who had convicted him! There seemed little doubt of that. But who was Clinton? And why, since the possibility of his being identical with Roth had been dissolved, had he been in such fear of being recognized by Barbara? And most puzzling of all, why, when Barbara had recognized him, had she recognized him as Roth?

Brewster was the first to speak.

"Gets me," he said, shaking his shaggy old head; "had some stickers when I was in the Mounted, but this'n beats all." Then looking at Father Corriveau,

"An' to think this ol' scalawag probably knows the whole blame thing an' won't tell us."

"I've told you all I can," replied the priest.

The next morning Lisle told Barbara what the priest had said.

"I cannot understand it," said the girl. "I could still almost swear that it was Herbert Roth's face I saw at Ft. Wrigley. There is something about it that would be hard to forget, having once

seen it. And why was Clinton so much disturbed at my having recognized him?"

"It is puzzling," replied Lisle, "and I must confess that I am entirely in the dark. The other phases of the situation have been practically cleared up. The Lüger bullet proves that Lord Harold was the one who really killed Roth. Evidently it was Steve's which caught him in the arm. We will just have to wait and hope that the rest will clear itself up sooner or later. In the meantime, of course, you will wish to continue your search for your brother."

"Certainly."

"As you can judge for yourself there are not sufficient provisions to stake us out from here. The only course seems to be to proceed as we had planned, and there outfit for the journey through the summer months."

"I have been thinking it over, too," replied Barbara, "and have come to practically the same conclusion. You will realize of course that at the Fort our ways must — part."

"Naturally that is your wish. Nevertheless I must receive orders to that effect from McLean. His last, as you have read, were to continue with you — but I shall wire him from the Fort."

"And if he refuses to change the orders?"

"I must refuse to leave you."

The fire came into the girl's eyes again.

"You have a great deal more presumption than I had given you credit for!" she replied with spirit.

"It is not enough that you have forced your company upon me for eleven months, but you must now continue to do so! Really, if I were in your place I believe I should find some way to induce Commissioner McLean to change the orders!"

"I have no right to interfere with the orders of a Commissioner. Nevertheless, I shall do my best to dissuade him, as I assure you I am anything but eager to accompany you against your will, in spite of what you may think to the contrary. There is one thing, however, which I may do if McLean insists upon my going with you. My term of service expires in two months. It will be fully a month before we would leave on the summer trip. If I should resign —"

"You would do that?"

"Gladly. Then you would be obliged to suffer my company for only a month."

"I think it will not be necessary for you to resign. I shall wire to McLean myself."

"Very well. As you like. Brewster will no doubt be willing to be your guide, and you could have no better. Also, we may find Naomi at the Bay."

"And Danny!"

"I hope so."

"Oh, so do I! If I never appreciated him before, I do now!"

"I am glad for that. He merits all the appreciation you have to give him!"

The man's tone was absolutely sincere. The girl looked at him quizzically. Did he still care for her? There was no intimation of jealousy in his attitude toward Danny Blake. What a strange combination of things was this man in whom she had been so cruelly disappointed!

The journey to Ft. Churchill was completed in five days. They found no trace of Blake or Naomi.

Father Corriveau left the party at the cabin. Before leaving he had taken Barbara aside and said a few words to her alone.

"It has been my lot to pay little attention, on the surface of things, to the difference in the breed of men," he said, taking her hand and looking keenly

into the clear eyes, "but within me I have learned them well. I make no man's affair my own unless he asks me, and then I will help him if his purpose be good, be he outlaw or not. Neither have I any intention of changing that habit now. But I would like to tell you before I go what my eyes could not help but see — that for some reason at which I may only guess you are taking a mistaken attitude toward a very splendid man — an attitude which I am thoroughly convinced he does not deserve."

"If you are referring to John Lisle," replied Barbara, "then I must say that I cannot agree with you. For eleven months he followed me through the North on the trail of my brother with the purpose of arresting him on the charge of murder after I should track him down! — because he was unable to capture him alone! He permitted me to believe I was tracking my brother solely for the purpose of our reunion, and appeared to be helping me to do so! He was supposed to be my protector! He had nothing to do with finding my brother — he failed to protect me when I most needed him — my brother found *him* — took him back from the door of death. And then this man whom you call 'splendid' would have claimed him for his prisoner, and taken him

back as such! A ‘splendid’ man, indeed! A hero!”

“ Lisle was carrying out his orders. Sometimes that is the hardest thing in the world to do. It is the men who simply carry out their orders, even though they carry their colors down to defeat, while others perform the deeds which gain for them the laurel wreath, that are the heroes.”

“ And what about the worthiness or unworthiness of the cause they serve so faithfully? Does that count for nothing? If the Law says shoot this man in the back, or murder this one before his children, would a man be blameless who would do it?”

“ The Law is not infallible. It is man-made and man-enforced and therefore it is many times unjust. It must change, and it must grow toward an effort at perfection. But it is the best thing we have — and until we have a better we must obey it and help it to be enforced — for without it the world would go mad. You think little of the soldier who will not fight for his country, be the cause of her quarrel the desire for selfish gain, or a feud of kings. John Lisle is a soldier of the Law — and he must carry out the oath of his allegiance.”

The girl was staring at a little clump of spruces

beyond the clearing, but her eyes did not see it.

"It is a strange place, this world of men," she said slowly, "with a strange code of honor—and it seems stranger still that this code should be upheld by a man who is enlisted in the Divine Order. I cannot understand it. And I cannot become reconciled to it. I am sorry."

"You will think it over," said Father Corriveau gently, "and you will come to see it—and you will try to help it—as you would help anything that is young and faulty and trying to grow toward a worthy purpose. I know you will—because I see in your eyes that which I have seen in the eyes of the men and women who have helped it thus far. Go, now, and forget that I have spoken, if you will."

At Dawson, on the 2nd of April, Commissioner McLean of the Mounted received three telegrams from Ft. Churchill. At the first one he frowned, at the second he smiled, and at the third he laughed very loudly indeed. Then he proceeded to reply to them.

On April 3rd three telegrams were received at the station at Ft. Churchill, from Dawson. One

was addressed to "Sergt. John Lisle," another to "Miss Barbara Barrows," and a third to "Mr. Roscoe Brewster." There was a general parting of the company as each recipient sought a secluded corner of the room in which to read the contents of his message.

The one addressed to Lisle read as follows:

" You've your orders. What more do you want?  
" MCLEAN."

To Barbara,

" Sorry. Would change even the Law of Gravitation if I could, but unfortunately am unable to do so. Make no apologies for selection of escort, however, as they don't make them any better.

" COMMISSIONER MCLEAN."

And to Brewster,

" You're a hell of a chaperon."

There was a general secret rise of feeling as each of the three objected that their particular telegram

was very unsatisfactory. Followed a unanimous move toward the blanks, and late in the afternoon Commissioner McLean was again the recipient of three messages from Hudson Bay.

To Lisle's he replied,

"Resignation papers mailed yesterday. I'm not as nearsighted as I look. In fact I can see farther than you can. Congratulations!"

To Brewster's,

"Try a June evening. You can't expect much from seventy below. Give them time."

And to Barbara's,

"Don't be a silly little fool. Marry him."

Two sounds followed the reading of the telegrams — the enthusiastic tearing of paper, and an old man's smothered chuckle.

Summer came again to the North country — and with it the thaw. The caribou, the geese and the

ducks and other birds came back to the mountains, and the Barrens were covered with moss. Across the prairies and around the foothills rang the mating calls of the creatures of the wild.

For three months the Siren Country smiled and wore wild flowers in her hair and then came September.

One day near the end of this month, Commissioner McLean and Roscoe Brewster sat talking together in the former's office at Dawson.

"Go on," the Commissioner was saying, "I'm waiting to hear the rest of it."

"Well — seems like Barrows an' Clinton meets up somewhere near Lost Valley, some time after Barrows has escaped bein' took by Lisle. Clinton draws on 'im but don't get away with it somehow or other, an' Barrows has 'im cornered, when along comes Father Corriveau, who is returnin' to Hope Castle to hang out a spell. It seems Barrows is some shook up thinkin' Clinton is Herbert Roth, an' Clinton is some shook up for reasons afterwards disclosed. Father Corriveau asks questions an' unravels answers an' does a heap of persuadin', until he has Clinton tellin' Barrows who killed Jack Robin — which is Greek for sayin' that Clinton, whose

U. S. name was Clark, confessed to havin' committed the crime for which Herbert Roth was convicted!

"It seems Clark an' Roth was doubles as far as appearance went — an' mebbe a good deal farther, as any man who'll take the trouble Roth took to get vengeance on Barrows ain't much better, in my mind, than one who covets 'is neighbor's goods. At any rate, Clark was the only one of the two who was wise to the resemblance, it bein' sort of in his line of business to watch for chance opportunities. Consequently he pulls off the grand larceny, takin' great care to be seen by a fool servant, an' some way or other turns the suspicion on Roth. Clark skips for Canada an' joins the Mounted under the headin' of Clinton, thinkin' to serve one term an' then resign an' spend 'is booty. Roth is convicted an' serves the term."

"And after the confession?"

"Me an' Miss Barrows an' Lisle arrives. We'd trailed Steve to Lost Valley by means of a couple of trappers who'd seen 'im headin' in that direction, an' later by Smoke, the Injun who'd been erstwhile attached to Clark. He'd found Steve's trail an' followed 'im, thinkin' he might be Lord Harold.

"Of course as soon as we struck Barrows' trail the dog took it up with a vengeance an' we had no trouble tracin' 'im after that.

"Well, as I was sayin', we all arrived just after the grand confession, with the news of Barrows' bein' cleared, an' after the family reunion we all sits down to talk over where were we goin' from there. It was generally agreed that what to do with Clark was the first point to be considered, an' as Lisle had resigned from the Mounted he hadn't any right to arrest 'im, an' Steve figured he didn't neither. So Father Corriveau suggests we give 'im a chance an' a stake an' let 'im go, an' if anybody wanted to go after 'im later, all right. Miss Barbara an' Steve then had a little talk in which Miss Barbara told 'im he must send at once to be reinstated in the Service. Said he should do all he could to help it to grow up big an' healthy an' better or something like that. She puts her argument so strong Steve is for startin' at once for the nearest telegraph station. I figures to go with 'im, an' Father Corriveau he says he's kind o' hankerin' after another little jaunt himself. The only ones who didn't seem particular about goin' anywhere was Miss Barbara an' Lisle."

"So the June evening worked?"

" You said it. Although the thaw really begun somewhere in May."

The Commissioner chuckled.

" Well? "

" Any fool could figure out the rest. A isolated retreat in a place by the name of Lost Valley, fixed up with all the comforts of home, includin' a priest an' witnesses, an' God's country fairly wavin' with flowers!"

The two men sat silent for a moment. Then the Commissioner asked,

" Did you ever come across Naomi? "

The old man nodded.

" Found 'er on the way back, at the cabin where Lord Harold was buried. She hadn't found any trace of the tenderfoot she went after. We could hardly get 'er to leave the place, but Smoke finally persuaded 'er. She'd planted some flowers over the outlaw's grave."

The Commissioner puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

" A strange thing — love," he said finally.

" Love? "

" Yes. Naomi loved that outlaw. He came to Dawson when she was younger — and more fair —

and she disappeared with him. A year later she came back. No one ever asked her why. There was that in her eyes which forbade it. I have often wondered — and now I know. A strange and a very lovely thing — faithfulness — like that! It is the way with some women!"

A summer twilight in the country of the Southland — her loveliness enhanced with the rose of the afterglow — with pale blue and violet mists, and decked with tiny gems of yellow light.

In a rose arbor by the side of a cottage, a man and a woman — a woman with eyes like the wide bright wings of a blue butterfly, looking up into the face of the man as he strummed the strings of a guitar and sang the words of a love song.

"Oh, Danny!" breathed the girl as the song was ended. "Suppose — suppose those trappers had never found you — suppose you'd —" and a soft hand closed tightly about the man's slim fingers. He gathered her up in his arms.

"Hush, little girl," he said softly, "we weren't going to talk about that any more!"

"I know, but —"

"I had a letter from Barbara and John to-day."

"What did they say?"

"John said that he was very, very glad that the little Butterfly girl from his home town had ceased her tantalizing flights, and had at last folded her wings — remember, I'm quoting — in a golden house — the heart of Danny Blake!"

"Ah, you see, he knows! And Barbara?"

"Many things — mostly about little cottages on the edge of Nowhere — Mariposa lilies growing through the snow — and the laughter of — pa-pooses!"

THE END











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